Title: Using Solution-Focused Brief Therapy with an Amateur Football Team: A

Trainee's Case Study

Author(s): McCormick, Alister

Solution-focused brief therapy with an amateur football team: A trainee's case study

Alister McCormick

This case study describes the application of a solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) theoretical framework by a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist working with an amateur football team. The case study describes SFBT and how the practitioner was guided by SFBT principles during each stage of service provision. It is not intended to describe a "success story" or the neat application of a theoretical framework. Instead, it reflects a trainee's real-life (and somewhat "messy") application of SFBT principles in a team context. It demonstrates that not everything will go to plan and emphasises the importance of adapting to the context.

The practitioner

The author is a Trainee Sport and Exercise Psychologist enrolled on the British Psychological Society's Stage 2 Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology. Before commencement of the case study, the author had experience following a SFBT theoretical framework during one-to-one consultancy with athletes who competed in karate, lacrosse, basketball, swimming and rugby. This case study describes the practitioner's first experience working with a team.

Theoretical framework

The sport psychology service was designed and implemented using principles from SFBT (de Shazer et al., 2007; Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001; Iveson, 2002; O'Connell, 2005)

and solution-focused group work (Sharry, 2007). Broader psychological literature (e.g., goal setting, performance profiles, transtheoretical model of change) was drawn upon throughout, particularly during the assessment and evaluation of consultancy.

Solution-focused therapists believe that "clients already know what to do to solve the complaints they bring to therapy; they just do not know that they know" (de Shazer et al., 1986, p.220). A solution-focused therapist believes that the client possesses strengths, knowledge, values, coping strategies and solutions, many of which they have used before and not recognized, that they can use to solve or cope with the presenting problem. The psychologist facilitates the change process by asking questions that they believe will help the client to explore their goals, to understand "what's different" when the problem is not evident and to identify manageable steps that the client can take towards solving the problem. A psychologist following a SFBT framework explores the problem, as described by the client in his or her own language, towards the beginning of the first session but most of the subsequent dialogue in the first and future sessions focuses on finding the solution. Through carefully-selected questions, the psychologist helps the client to understand, in fine detail, what would be different if the problem were solved. The psychologist explores *exceptions*, periods where the problem was absent or less severe, to identify and reinforce the resources or methods through which the client brought about this change. The psychologist also helps the client to explore what would be different if the client took one small step towards solving the problem and helps the client to identify small, manageable steps to take. Towards the end of a session, the psychologist takes a short break to prepare a message for the client. This message involves "compliments", where the psychologist verbally praises the client's attempts to bring about change, draws attention to the client's valuable skills and qualities, reinforces the methods that have led to an improvement in the

client's experience and reminds the client of his or her possible next steps (for a compliment template, see Campbell, Elder, Gallagher, Simon, & Taylor, 1999). The psychologist will also set a task for the client to complete before the next session that is designed to encourage the client to take a step towards solving the problem. Together, these stages can offer the client hope of improvement and empower the client to make changes (Hoigaard & Johansen, 2004).

SFBT could be a valuable framework in the sport context because of its ability to work with the client's goals and strengths. Athletes possess psychological characteristics, skills and coping strategies that have helped them to reach their current performance level, they have goals that they are working towards and they have ample experience that you can search together for exceptions and solutions. A solution-focused therapist could help athletes or coaches to overcome problems that are affecting performance or quality of participation, particularly when fast and sustainable improvements are desirable, or help athletes and teams to build on their current strengths. It is therefore surprisingly that SFBT has received little attention in the sport and exercise psychology literature (see Gutkind, 2004; Hoigaard & Johansen, 2004; Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007; Williams & Strean, 2005). While solution-focused therapy has promising research support outside sport and exercise (see Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000; Kim, 2008), few randomised controlled trials have examined its efficacy and it has not received research interest in sport and exercise psychology.

The client and first contact

"The Rovers" are a Sunday League football team in South East England. They train once a week on a Wednesday evening and they compete on Sundays. The players range in age from 18 to 50. The player-manager, Tom, contacted the sport science department where I am based by email:

I am the manager of a local football team and I'm investigating sport psychology and other motivation techniques. Although our club is established, the team I am working with is made up of players that have recently joined and are yet to gel as our performances have been lacking competiveness. Sport psychology is of high interest to me and I feel it could help us but I have little understanding so I wondered whether you may have someone, possibly a student, who would like a squad to practise with. I am open to ideas.

This email was passed to me during the first month of my PhD. I sent an information sheet that described the service that I provide and relevant ethical issues (e.g., limitations to confidentiality) to Tom by email and I asked him to read the information sheet so that we could discuss its content on the telephone. Having spoken to my PhD supervisor about the joint demands of studying for a PhD and university teaching, Tom and I agreed that I would work with the team once I had settled in to my role at the university. I offered to work with the team voluntarily and Tom agreed to drive me to and from training. I contacted Tom approximately two months later and I spent time in between studying the application of SFBT in a group context (Sharry, 2007). At both time points, The Rovers had lost all of their league matches and they had conceded more than ten goals in some of these matches.

Needs analysis and assessment

The first stage of assessment involved telephone interviews with the manager. These interviews were guided by principles from SFBT. I firstly asked Tom to describe the problem. I then asked

what is happening when the problem is not evident (i.e., exploration of exceptions). The following extracts were taken from my notes:

> The problem is particularly evident during a match after conceding a goal. The team concede a goal and then they concede many in quick succession. The problem becomes evident when the team become frustrated and give up. They start shouting negative comments, they communicate aggressively (particularly towards worst performers), they ball watch, and they lose the ball and then stop (rather than chasing back). The negativity "spirals"; a player makes a mistake, they get criticised and then they play worse.

> When the problem is not evident, the team are "competitive". Tom sees the players chasing the ball down, giving teammates an option, looking for simple passes, passing and moving, tackling with commitment and frustrating the opposition by keeping the ball. The players are communicating clearly and encouraging, praising and leading each other.

Next, I observed the manager and team during a training session. One purpose of this observation was to gain an understanding of where sport psychology might "fit in" with the existing Wednesday evening structure. I also wanted to feel comfortable in the presence of the players so that I could facilitate the upcoming group sessions with confidence. The third stage of the assessment involved a group meeting with the team in the clubhouse. I asked the team about their understanding of sport psychology and I clarified common misconceptions (e.g., that there must be something "wrong" before you work with a sport psychologist). I told the players that psychology plays a role in every sport and I asked players to offer examples of when anxiety,

motivation, concentration and confidence had affected their performance. I then explained that

sport psychology is about choosing to purposely work on these aspects of performance and not

leaving them to chance (Simons, 2010). The purpose of these discussions was to encourage the

players to situate themselves in the contemplation stage of change (Leffingwell, Rider, &

Williams, 2001) and be receptive to what I had to offer. With consideration for confidentiality in

a group setting, I followed the advice of Andersen (2005) and relayed the following message:

> Ok folks, I would like to start today with saying that this is 'our time'. And I want
>
> everyone to be as comfortable as possible and feel free to bring up any concerns you
>
> might have. To help people feel comfortable, I would like that we come to an agreement
>
> that what we say in here stays in here. The stuff that we discuss is our stuff and not for
>
> others. This way we make sure everyone's contributions are valued and respected. How
>
> does that sound? (p.10)

The players supported this message. Next, I conducted a group performance profile

exercise with the team. The aims of completing a performance profile as a team were to raise

awareness of psychological aspects of performance, to help identify the needs of the team as a

whole and to set goals for consultancy. Performance profiling is frequently used by sport

psychologists during the assessment stage of consultancy and is often re-visited as an evaluation

tool (e.g., Lane, 2009; Marlow, 2009; Thelwell, 2009). I acted as a facilitator of discussion and

encouraged the players to identify the psychological characteristics of the best teams in their

division. The team reached consensus on what they considered the most important psychological

characteristics and we explored what each characteristic "looks like" on the pitch. Next, the team

divided the number of "slices" in the 16-slice performance profile depending on their relative importance. Finally, the team rated the team as a whole in each characteristic between zero (complete absence of quality) and ten (greatest demonstration of quality in an opposition). The final profile can be summarised as below:

- "Belief" was given five slices and rated as 2/10.

- "Communication" was given four slices and rated as 3/10.

- "Motivation" was given three slices and rated as 2/10.

- "Enjoyment" was given two slices and rated as 2/10.

- "Composure" was given two slices and rated as 2/10.

By rating their position on a scale of one to ten, this exercise was compatible with scaling questions from SFBT. For example, I would later be able to ask, "What would be different if belief increased from two to four?" or "What will you do on Sunday to show that communication is higher than a three?" As an additional assessment tool, the players anonymously completed a one-item questionnaire (Grove, Norton, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1999, adapted from Cardinal, 1995) that was intended to identify their stage of change with respect to the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). This questionnaire was chosen over the validated questionnaires available (e.g., Leffingwell, Rider, & Williams, 2001) because it is practical to complete in a group setting. This questionnaire allowed me to assess the group's overall openness towards sport psychology. One player was identified as being in the pre-contemplation stage ("I do not use regular mental skills training and I do not plan to start within the next six months"), six players were identified as being in the pre-contemplation stage ("I do not use regular mental skills training but I have been thinking about starting within the next six

months"), three players were identified as being in the preparation stage ("I use mental skills training but not regularly"), two players were identified as being in the action stage ("I regularly use mental skills training but I have only begun doing so within the past six months") and one player was identified as being in the maintenance stage ("I regularly use mental skills training and I have done so for longer than six months"). I judged that, overall, the players were curious and open-minded about what I had to offer.

Service delivery overview

I initially delivered the solution-focused intervention to the team on a group basis. After five group sessions, however, I began to work one-to-one with the manager and assist by designing solution-focused questions for him to deliver before training and matches. Throughout consultancy, I observed the team train and offered feedback and suggestions to the manager. I will explore each of these approaches to consultancy individually. The manager and I used travelling time to training to discuss the previous match and to re-visit the plans for the sport psychology session and the training session. On the way back from training, we reflected on what went well and what we could have done differently. I also used this opportunity to provide feedback on my observations. Table 1 provides an overview of the service delivery timeline.

Table 1

Timeline of Service Delivery

Date	Service
October 2012	First contact from the manager.
October - December 2012	Email / telephone contact with the manager.

December 2012	I agreed to observe the team train. Three training sessions were postponed because of snow.
January 2013	Observation of a training session, assessment team meeting and commencement of solution-focused group work.
January - March 2013	Solution-focused group work (five sessions).
March - May 2013	Working with the manager on a one-to-one basis (four sessions).
May 2013	End-of-season evaluation.

Solution-focused group sessions

Group sessions were conducted in the clubhouse during the hour preceding training. The first solution-focused group session was based around the *miracle question*. The miracle question encourages the client(s) to be creative and imagine exactly what would be different if the problem were solved. DeJong and Berg (1998) suggested wording the miracle question in the following way:

> Now, I want to ask you a strange question. Suppose that while you are sleeping tonight and the entire house is quiet, a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problem which brought you here is solved. However, because you are sleeping, you don't know that the miracle has happened. So, when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will tell you a miracle has happened and the problem which brought you here is solved? (p.77-78)

As the team play on a Sunday, I asked the players to imagine that the miracle happened while they were sleeping on the approaching Saturday night. I asked the players to discuss in small groups the first thing that they would notice that told them that the problem had been solved. Each group then shared their ideas with the rest of team and we explored the whole day in detail, beginning with the time that they would get up in the morning. The following descriptions of the miracle day were among the ideas that the players shared (notice that most of these ideas are controllable):

- The players would be well prepared for the match (e.g., clean boots, bag packed the evening before, lift to match organised), they would eat a healthy breakfast and they would arrive at the pitch on time.

- When they arrived at the pitch, there would be good banter between the players. The players would be smiling, looking energetic, and encouraging and saying positive things to each other (e.g., "I'm looking forward to this").

- The players would be quick out of the changing room and on to the pitch. They would be vocal during the warm up and there would be banter between the players before kick-off.

- Immediately before the match, the players would be thinking about what they need to do well during the match and listening when the manager speaks.

- During the match, communication between the players would be positive (e.g., encouragement) and clear (e.g., informing teammates of the oppositions' positions and runs). Players would be running in to space, closing the opposition down, chasing loose balls and "doing the basics right" (e.g., simple passes).

- If the team conceded a goal, their heads would stay up and they would encourage the goalkeeper. Their communication would remain positive and clear and the team would continue doing the basics right.

With each suggestion, I encouraged others in the group to consider the effect that this change might have on them (e.g., "Ben, how would you respond if James was chasing loose balls?") and to offer additional observations (e.g., "Jason, if the team demonstrated this improved communication, would you notice anything else?"). I also encouraged the players to identify observable behaviours through questions such as, "What would you see that told you Ben felt more motivated?" By involving as many players as possible, I intended to help the team identify a greater number of observable differences and gain a shared understanding of what they would like to achieve. I ended the session by asking the team what their first step towards the miracle would be. They discussed this in small groups and each player offered one action that they would take on the following Sunday. I set each player the task of taking this one action on the upcoming Sunday.

The following four group sessions were designed to explore exceptions that occurred during the preceding match. I attempted to draw attention to moments of the match where the problem was not evident, expand on the specific details of what was different, identify positive consequences and reinforce what the team did to bring about these improvements (Sharry, 2007). We discussed those periods of the match that were enjoyable, when they communicated well, when they possessed belief, and when they were motivated or composed. I approached this by asking the following questions: "What was better on Sunday?"; "Did the miracle happen, even for only 30 seconds, during the last match?"; and "What was different during the first twenty

minutes when you were playing better?" I encouraged the players to reflect on how they brought about these changes by asking questions such as, "What did you do that made this match so enjoyable?", "How could someone at the side of the pitch tell that you were motivated?" and "What will you do on Sunday to make that happen again?" I also asked the players to locate their current position on a zero to 10 miracle scale (where zero represents the worst the problem has been and 10 represents the miracle) and I asked scaling questions (e.g., "What will you do on Sunday to move from a four to a five", "What will be different if you are a six instead of a five?"). At the end of each session, I offered solution-focused compliments and a message to the team. I thanked the players for being open-minded, for attending and for contributing. I also pointed out that they described occasions where they did believe in themselves, where they communicated well, where they were motivated, where they were enjoying themselves or when they were composed. I told the group that there is hope in these exceptions and that an aim of working together will be to encourage these things to happen more often. I closed by reminding the players of the steps that they suggested they could take towards their goal and, as a task, I asked the players to identify one change that they would be willing to commit to on the following Sunday either individually or as a team. As an example of a team task, the players and manager agreed that the players would focus on playing short, simple passes during the first five minutes of the match.

Obstacles encountered and reflection

Numerous factors contributed towards my decision to change the format of my service delivery. First, attendance in the sport psychology sessions decreased after the first three sessions. I speculated in my reflective diary that the novelty that drew players to the first sessions began to

wear. Second, attendance at the group sessions was unreliable and the players in attendance varied substantially each week. This meant that there was little consistency between sessions in the key issues discussed, the short-term goals identified (e.g., moving from a five to a six on the miracle scale) and the agreed action plan (i.e., players were not present during the next week to provide feedback). Additionally, the starting 11 on a Sunday was often represented by few players who had attended the preceding sport psychology session and so the goals identified on the Wednesday were not shared by, and often undermined by, many of those playing on the Sunday. I decided to adapt my service to better meet the needs of the team.

During the session that focused on the miracle question, I felt that the involvement and cooperation of the team complemented the solution-focused approach and fostered belief that the team could make changes in the upcoming match. The players offered different suggestions about what would be different if the problem were solved and I was able to invite other members of the team to add details. I found it difficult, however, during subsequent sessions to keep the group solution-focused, rather than problem-focused; the content of the discussions became focused on what certain players had "done wrong" during a negative match experience. There are questions that I ask during one-to-one consultancy to keep the dialogue solution focused such as, "What will you be instead of frustrated?", "Were there times during the match when this didn't happen?" or "What would you rather see instead of this?" Nevertheless, I felt outnumbered asking these questions. I found that certain players were more negative than others and these players dominated some of the discussions. The momentum seemed to build in the wrong direction; others players were encouraged to be (unconstructively) critical of their teammates. In future consultancies, I would explain to the team before each session (accounting for new attendees) how I would like to see the group communicating during the session. I would

also educate the manager and key individuals (e.g., captain) about what I am trying to achieve through the session so that they can help me to keep the discussions constructive.

Working with the manager

Throughout the group sessions and when I was present at training, I consistently explained to Tom my justification for asking particular solution-focused questions. I particularly reinforced the idea that I was looking to identify SPOC (specific, positive, observable and controllable) behaviours that were present when the team were playing better. With five fixtures remaining, I decided to change the intervention format. I designed a solution-focused form after each match that Tom completed in preparation for training. This form asked questions relating to exceptions, strengths and solutions that were evident during the match. The below questions have been extracted from one of these forms:

- What was the team doing well during the first eighty minutes that they stopped doing during the final ten minutes? Can you identify specific examples? Focus on what the team did well during the first eighty minutes, rather than what they did during the final ten minutes.

- What was different during the first eighty minutes compared to the final ten minutes?

- What did you see that you want to see more often?

- Did anyone in particular do anything that seemed to help?

In a changing room during the 20 minutes preceding training, Tom asked the same questions to the players and he shared his own observations with the team. Tom offered solution-focused compliments by praising the team and individual members for behaviours that were valuable during the previous match (e.g., examples of specific communication or demonstrations

of composure). After each of these meetings, I complimented Tom on those moments where he demonstrated exemplary solution-focused questioning and I suggested new or modified questions that he could ask in the future. I also suggested solution-focused questions that Tom could ask before the match on a Sunday (e.g., "How would you like the first five minutes of the match to play out? Specifically, what would you like to see?"). This approach to consultancy aimed to offer Tom a simple solution-focused framework that he could continue to use after we finish working together. The reduced time commitment was chosen to encourage more reliable attendance by the players.

Observations, feedback and suggestions

I observed training sessions throughout consultancy and I offered feedback and suggestions based on my observations. I gave feedback to Tom during the car journey back from training and I followed this up with an email. Observations were guided by SFBT literature and sport psychology literature. Specifically, I looked for examples of exceptions, strengths and successes (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001) that were evident during training (e.g., use of specific verbal instructions) and I reinforced these by pointing them out to the player or to the manager. Additionally, I encouraged the manager to set process goals for each training session and I encouraged him to re-visit these goals before each relevant training drill and training match. I also suggested that solution-focused questioning could complement these goals (e.g., "What will I see that tells me that you're more composed?", "Specifically, what will you be doing when you are 'more motivated'?", "What does 'good communication' sound like?"). Tom often observes the training sessions of a professional football team and he noticed that their manager stops training when a player does well to acknowledge their achievement. I suggested

that Tom could stop the training session when a player demonstrates the psychological characteristic that they are working on and draw attention to it. I also offered suggestions that were based on common sense. For example, I pointed out that allowing the players to pass the ball off the walls on the side of the pitch was counterproductive to encouraging composure.

Close of consultancy and evaluation of effectiveness

I included a combination of process and outcome measures in the evaluation of my effectiveness (Martindale & Collins, 2007). The league table that was released following the assessment and the miracle question group sessions showed that the team had zero points from 12 games and a goal difference of -120. The final league table showed that the team had six points from 23 games (the team won one match and were awarded three points when the team immediately above them folded) and a goal difference of -178. They finished bottom of the table. The average goal difference per match when I began working with the team was -10 and it was -5.3 during the next 11 fixtures.

Following each group session, I asked the players to anonymously complete an evaluation form (a process measure adapted from Sharry, 2007, see Appendix A) and to return these to the manager. These provided me with feedback on which aspects of the group session went well and where I could look to adjust my service. As suggested by Sharry (2007), scores as high as three out of five were treated as concerning because clients tend to under-report their dissatisfaction. I attempted to make adjustments based on the feedback. For example, some players scored, "I felt involved and active in the group today" and "I felt I had enough group time today" as three after the initial sessions and so I responded to this by specifically asking for players' opinions (particularly quieter players).

As an outcome measure, members of the team re-scored the team's position on the psychological profile seven weeks (three solution-focused sessions) after the assessment session. This was used to draw attention to and reinforce the behaviours that players used to improve their position on each characteristic (e.g., "How did you manage to improve your communication? What will you do to maintain this improvement?"). The manager also rated the team's final position on the scale during an end-of-season evaluation session. Although I originally intended to ask the players to recomplete the profile as part of the final evaluation, I decided that doing so would be meeting my own needs and not the needs of the team, particularly considering the change in service delivery approach. The positions on each of the five characteristics at the three dates are displayed in Table 2. The team appeared to improve in each of the five characteristics, particularly towards the end of the solution-focused group sessions; this session, however, was soon after the team won their one match.

Table 2

Performance Profile Measures of Psychological Characteristics

Characteristic	Assessment (January 2013)	Intervention meeting 4 (March 2013)	Evaluation session (May 2013)
Belief (5 slices)	2/10	8/10	3/10
Communication (4 slices)	3/10	7/10	5/10
Motivation (3 slices)	2/10	6/10	5/10
Enjoyment (2 slices)	2/10	7/10	6/10
Composure (2 slices)	2/10	5½/10	2/10

I created a final evaluation form, which the players completed anonymously after an end-of-season match when I was not present (Appendix B). Specifically, I adapted the Consultant Effectiveness Form (CEF, Partington & Orlick, 1987) to make it applicable to the group context. I also included social validity measures in this evaluation form (adapted from Patrick & Hrycaiko, 1998; Thelwell & Greenlees, 2003). Social validity measures determine whether the goals set for consultancy were perceived to be important by the client, whether the intervention methods used by the psychologist were viewed as acceptable and whether the client was satisfied with the results of the intervention (Wolf, 1978).

Partington and Orlick (1987) suggested that a rating of eight or less on the CEF could indicate that there is room for improvement in a particular area. Nine players completed this form and mean values were calculated. The items titled, "Had useful knowledge that seemed to apply directly to football" (mean = 7.4) and "Fitted in with others and connected with the team" (mean = 7.2) scored lowest and could offer an area for development in future practice. There was an indication that the intervention was perceived to have a greater effect on the team as a whole (mean = 3.6 out of 5) than players at the individual level (mean = 3.0 out of 5). The social validity measure demonstrated that the players supported the goals of consultancy and that they found the methods of delivery acceptable. There may be a response bias, however, because players who valued the service may have been more likely to complete the form, leading to higher mean scores.

I held an end-of-season evaluation meeting with Tom that was based on recommendations for terminating the counselling relationship (Mainwaring, 2010; Sutton & Stewart, 2008), as well as solution-focused principles. We revisited the original problem and service goals, the service delivery methods used throughout consultancy, areas of development

and insights, team strengths identified and agreed action plans for the future. During this meeting, I explained what a case study involves and I requested permission to proceed. Reflective practice was a valuable method of self-evaluation throughout consultancy. Putting time aside to think about aspects of consultancy that were going well and that were difficult helped me to learn from my experiences and identify changes that I could make for subsequent training sessions (Gibbs, 1988). Additionally, Tom provided informal feedback on my service after each training session.

Overall, I believe that a positive change did occur after the introduction of the sport psychology service. It is clear from performance results that the team were below the standard of their division, which means that it is difficult to detect an improvement through points only. The substantial improvement in goal difference, however, was promising. Based on informal feedback from the manager and players, it is possible that factors associated with the team spending more time together socially contributed towards an improvement in performance.

Reflection

Through working with The Rovers, I learned that applied sport psychology does not always go to plan. The sport psychology case study literature tends to report "success stories" that describe neat application of psychological principles, often with high-level athletes. For example, Hemmings and Holder (2009) described a series of case studies that were educationally informative and that generally appeared to "go well". Other case studies have used fictional or composite clients to describe how a particular theoretical framework could be applied in sport (e.g., Gutkind, 2004). Although the contents of this case study are factually accurate, the service delivery was a lot "messier" than it reads. For example, we had to run numerous sessions in the

bar area of the clubhouse, which was loud and not exclusive to the club, because the manager was unable to book the clubhouse meeting room (TV screens displaying football matches were a particular distraction). While it is clear that holding a group discussion in a bar is undesirable, The Rovers are an amateur team and more appropriate facilities were not available. Additionally, my attendance at four training sessions was cancelled within a couple of hours of me being collected from the university because Tom was no longer attending. Further, Tom was often late to collect me because he could not leave work and he also could be difficult to contact between training sessions. The content of each sport psychology session and the amount of time dedicated to each session was therefore "subject to change".

I also learned that I need to be adaptable. For example, my original intention was to run a group assessment after observing a training session. Many training sessions were cancelled because of the snow over the winter, however, and I realised that I might need to run psychology sessions *instead* of a cancelled training session. It is also important that I hold realistic expectations of my client. I had imagined the service that I would like to deliver in a professional context (e.g., weekly meetings with the whole team in a quiet location) but I soon realised that I would need to change my expectations and service delivery approach if I was going to meet the needs of my client. The Rovers are not a professional team (the manager often referred to the players as "volunteers") and so it would be unrealistic to expect a reliable turnout at the psychology sessions.

Delayed reflection

When I re-read this case study, I noticed that the outcome measures of effectiveness particularly referred to the performance of the team. As an amateur team, changes in commitment and

enjoyment could also have been meaningful for The Rovers. I could therefore have monitored the number of players who attended training and matches. While this applied experience was not glamorous, I believe that I developed important skills that will benefit my future applied work and university teaching. For example, I developed confidence facilitating group discussions in an environment that was filled with distractions and with athletes who had not all "bought in" to what I had to offer. As my client was an amateur team who were losing every week, I also had the opportunity to practise delivering a solution-focused theoretical framework in a team context where I could make mistakes and learn, without being under pressure to bring measureable improvements. Based on my experience working with The Rovers, I would encourage other trainees to step outside of their comfort zone and pursue applied work with a range of different clients, including athletes and teams who compete at different competitive levels.

References

Andersen, M. B. (2005). 'Yeah, I work with Beckham': Issues of confidentiality, privacy and

   privilege in sport psychology service delivery. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*,

   1(2), 3-13. Retrieved from http://www.bpsshop.org.uk/Sport-and-Exercise-C28.aspx

Campbell, J., Elder, J., Gallagher, D., Simon, J., & Taylor, A. (1999). Crafting the "tap on the

   shoulder": A compliment template for solution-focused therapy. *The American Journal of*

   Family Therapy, *27*, 35-47. doi:10.1080/019261899262087

Cardinal, B.J. (1995). The Stages of Exercise Scale and stages of exercise behaviour in female

   adults. *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, *35*, 87-92.

De Jong, P., & Berg, I.K. (1998). *Interviewing for solutions*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

de Shazer, S., Berg, I. K., Lipchik, E., Nunnally, E., Molnar, A., Gingerich, W., & Weiner-

Davis,

   M. (1986). Brief therapy: Focused solution development. *Family Process*, *25*, 207-222.

   doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1986.00207.x

de Shazer, S., Dolan, Y., Korman, H., Trepper, T., McCollum, E., & Berg, I. K. (2007). *More*

   than miracles: *The state of the art of solution-focused brief therapy*. New York, NY:

   Routledge.

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford,

   England: Oxford Brookes University, Further Education Unit.

Gingerich, W.J., & Eisengart, S. (2000). Solution-focused brief therapy: A review of the

outcome

   research. *Family Process*, *39*, 477-498. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2000.39408.x

Greenberg, G., Ganshorn, K., & Danilkewich, A. (2001). Solution-focused therapy: Counseling model for busy family physicians. *Canadian Family Physician*, *47*, 2289-2295. Retrieved from http://www.cfp.ca

Grove, J.R., Norton, P.J., Van Raalte, J.L., & Brewer, B.W. (1999). Stages of change as an outcome measure in the evaluation of mental skills training programs. *The Sport Psychologist*, *13*, 107-116. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Gutkind, S. M. (2004). Using solution-focused brief counselling to provide injury support. *The Sport Psychologist*, *18*, 75-88. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Hemmings, B., & Holder, T. (Eds.). (2009). *Applied sport psychology*: *A case-based approach*. Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hoigaard, R., & Johansen, B. T. (2004). The solution-focused approach in sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, *18*, 218-228. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Iveson, C. (2002) Solution-focused brief therapy. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, *8*, 149–156. doi:10.1192/apt.8.2.149

Kim, J.S. (2008). Examining the effectiveness of solution-focused brief therapy: A meta-analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *18*, 107-116. doi:10.1177/1049731507307807

Lane, A.M. (2009). Consultancy in the ring: Psychological support to a World Champion professional boxer. In B. Hemmings & T. Holder (Eds.), *Applied sport psychology*: *A case-based approach* (pp. 51-64). Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Leffingwell, T.R., Rider, S.P., & Williams, J.M. (2001). Application of the transtheoretical model

      to psychological skills training. *The Sport Psychologist*, *15*, 168-187. Retrieved from

      http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Lindsay, P., Breckon, J. D., Thomas, O., & Maynard, I. W. (2007). In pursuit of congruence: A

      personal reflection on methods and philosophy in applied psychology. *The Sport*

      Psychologist, *21*, 335-352. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Mainwaring, L. (2010). Endings: More than saying goodbye. In S.J. Hanrahan & M.B.

      Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied sport psychology* (pp. 69-78). London,

      England: Routledge.

Marlow, C. (2009). Creating positive performance beliefs: The case of a tenpin bowler. In B.

      Hemmings & T. Holder (Eds.), *Applied sport psychology*: *A case-based approach* (pp.

      65-88). Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Martindale, A., & Collins, D. (2007). Enhancing the evaluation of effectiveness with

      professional judgement and decision making. *The Sport Psychologist*, *21*, 458-474.

      Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

O'Connell, B. (2005). *Solution-focused therapy* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage.

Partington, J., & Orlick, T. (1987). The Sport Psychology Consultant Evaluation Form. *The Sport*

      Psychologist, *1*, 309-317. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Patrick, T.D., & Hrycaiko, D.W. (1998). Effects of a mental training package on an endurance

      performance. *The Sport Psychologist*, *12*, 283-299. Retrieved from

      http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Prochaska, J.O., DiClemente, C.C., & Norcross, J.C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviours. *American Psychologist*, *47*, 1102-1114. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.47.9.1102

Sharry, J. (2007). *Solution focused groupwork* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage.

Simons, J. (2010). The applied sport psychology intake. In S.J. Hanrahan & M.B. Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied sport psychology* (pp. 81-89). London, England: Routledge.

Sutton, J. & Stewart, W. (2008). *Learning to counsel* (3rd ed.). Oxford, England: How To Books.

Thelwell, R. (2009). Team goal setting in professional football. In B. Hemmings & T. Holder (Eds.), *Applied sport psychology*: *A case-based approach* (pp. 161-180). Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Thelwell, R.C., & Greenlees, I.A. (2003). Developing competitive endurance performance using mental skills training. *The Sport Psychologist*, *17*, 318-337. Retrieved from http://journals.humankinetics.com/TSP

Williams, D.J., & Strean, W.B. (2005). Little pain, much gain: Solution-focused counseling on physical activity. *Canadian Family Physician*, 51, 677-678. Retrieved from http://www.cfp.ca

Wolf, M.M. (1978). Social validity: The case for participative measurement or how applied behavior analysis is finding its heart. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *11*, 203-214. doi:10.1901/jaba.1978.11-203

Appendix A

Example session evaluation form (adapted from Sharry, 2007)

I am interested in hearing your views and feedback about the group meeting today to help us keep on track and ensure the group meets your needs and goals. Please be frank and honest – this will help me the most. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5. If you do not think that the question is relevant, please leave the question blank.

I felt the group content today was relevant to my needs and goals.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I found the group today helpful for me achieving my goals.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I felt understood and supported in the group today.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I felt I had enough group time today.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I felt involved and active in the group today.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I felt hopeful about progress at the end of the meeting today.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

I felt the facilitator managed the group well today.

Disagree strongly   1   2   3   4   5   Agree strongly

Please rate how useful the following group tasks were:

Describing the team's "miracle day"

Not useful   1   2   3   4   5   Useful

Discussing the next step the team will take towards the miracle

Not useful   1   2   3   4   5   Useful

Was there anything particularly helpful today that you would like more of?

Was there anything particularly unhelpful today that you would like less of?

Any other comments? Please feel free to write on both sides of the form.

Appendix B

End-of-season evaluation form

Please do <u>not</u> write your name on this form.

Please rate me on each of the following characteristics by using a number from 0 to 10 as seen on the scale below.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(Not at all)   (Yes,

definitely)

Consultant characteristics   Rate below

Alister…

…Had useful knowledge that seemed to apply directly to football.

…Seemed willing to provide a service based on the team's input and needs.

…Seemed open, flexible, and ready to collaborate / cooperate with us.

…Had a positive, constructive attitude.

…Proved to be trustworthy.

…Was easy for me to relate to (For example, I felt comfortable that he understood me).

…Fitted in with others and connected with the team.

…Tried to help the team draw upon our strengths (in other words, the things that have worked for us

before) in order to make our better performances more consistent.

…Tried to help the team overcome problems or weaknesses in order to make our better performances

even better and more consistent.

…Provided clear, practical strategies for us to try out in an attempt to solve problems, or to improve the

level and consistency of our performances.

How effective was the consultant?

	Hindered / interfered									Helped a lot
Effect on you:	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Effect on team:	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the below questions by using a number from 0 to 10 as seen on the scale below.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

(Not at all)   (Extremely)

                                                           <u>Rate below</u>

How important is an improvement in performance to you?

How important is an improvement in team belief to you?

How important is an improvement in team communication to you?

How important is an improvement in team enjoyment to you?

How important is an improvement in team motivation to you?

How important is an improvement in team composure to you?

Were Alister's "methods" (team meetings / observations) acceptable to you?

Overall, has the sport psychology service been useful to the team?

Do you have any recommendations to improve the quality or effectiveness of the sport psychology service being provided?