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4   Informing the Development of an Organizational Stress Management Intervention in Sport: A

5   Mixed Method Stress Audit

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1   Abstract

2   *Objectives:* The purposes of this study were twofold: to conduct a mixed method

3   organizational-level stress audit within a sport organization and to explore recommendations

4   for organizational stress management.

5   *Design and Method:* Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and surveys were conducted

6   with 47 participants (professional sportsmen, coaches, sport science support and

7   administrative staff) who represented a professional sport organization. Content analysis was

8   employed to analyze the data.

9   *Results and Conclusions:* The findings indicated a wide range of organizational stressors

10   (e.g., cultural and academy issues), appraisals and coping behaviors (e.g., emotion-focused

11   behaviors), and stressor outcomes (e.g., emotional responses) for sport performers. Content

12   analysis and survey data supported the categorization of stress management recommendations

13   at both an individual- (e.g., coping education) and organizational-level (e.g., improving

14   communication channels) for particular target groups (e.g., players, staff, team). The

15   identification of stress audit factors and recommendations have important implications for the

16   optimization of organizational functioning within professional sport. Consistent with

17   organizational psychology research, applied considerations for mixed method and multi-level

18   intervention approaches are discussed.

19   *Keywords*: appraisals, emotions, coping, individual-level, organizational-level, team

20   building.

1   Informing the Development of an Organizational Stress Management Intervention in Sport: A

2   Mixed Method Stress Audit

3   The growing body of literature concerning organizational stress suggests that it may

4   be a critical factor in determining well-being and performance development in sport (Fletcher

5   & Arnold, 2017). Based on a transactional conceptualization (Lazarus, 1991; McGrath,

6   1976), organizational stress has been defined as "an ongoing transaction between an

7   individual and the environmental demands associated primarily and directly with the

8   organization within which he or she is operating" (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006, p.

9   329). For young athletes aspiring to develop within professional sport, they are typically

10   required to manage a range of environmental demands within their sport organization, such as

11   training load, logistics, poor team cohesion, and the prospect of being released (Arnold &

12   Fletcher, 2012; Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu, & Neil, 2012a). The management of these

13   organizational stressors is important for reducing the negative spillover that may occur

14   between ongoing exposure to organizational (e.g., leadership styles, selection), performance

15   (e.g., opponents, social evaluation), and personal stressors (e.g., parental expectations,

16   romantic relationships); which collectively may be detrimental to well-being (Duong,

17   Tuckey, Hayward, & Boyd, 2015). For those performers operating in sport organizations, the

18   successful management of organizational stress may not only facilitate the maximization of

19   well-being and performance development at an individual-level, but it is also likely to support

20   the effective functioning of teams and institutions at an organizational-level (Wagstaff,

21   Fletcher, & Hanton, 2012). Despite this, organizational stress management interventions,

22   which aim to improve the psychosocial environment and enhance the well-being of personnel

23   (Nielsen, Randall, Holten, & Rial González, 2010) are currently limited in sport psychology

24   research (Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2012). This limited evidence-base is problematic for

25   advancing sport psychologists' knowledge of how best to develop effective organizational

1   stress management interventions.

2   According to the organizational psychology literature, one of the key ingredients for

3   increasing the likelihood of effective stress management interventions in organizations is the

4   systematic and careful assessment of stress processes prior to intervention development

5   (Bowling, Beehr, & Grebner, 2012). To reliably understand the context of organizational

6   stress as a means to inform appropriate stress management initiatives, it is necessary to

7   conduct an organizational-level stress audit; one that is able to identify the individual and

8   group needs of those operating in organizations (Nielsen et al., 2010), so that initiatives can

9   be developed to modify environmental demands and / or a person's resources. A stress audit

10 is traditionally a generic term which describes a number of approaches which aim to identify

11 potential environmental demands (i.e., stressors), assess which have the greatest negative

12 impact and identify any individuals, and groups who are most at risk (Rick, Briner, Daniels,

13 Perryman, & Guppy, 2001). Although there have been a range of measures that have been

14 adopted for auditing stressors in organizations (e.g., Biron, Ivers, Brun, & Cooper, 2006), it

15 has long been acknowledged that a comprehensive audit, based on a transactional stress

16 conceptualization (Lazarus, 1991), should reflect the sequence of events and stress processes

17 that occur across individuals in transacting with their environment (McGrath, 1976). In this

18 way, it is believed that an organizational-level stress audit should identify key organizational

19 stressors, appraisal and coping strategies, stressor outcomes, at risk groups, and attitudes

20 towards available options for stress management (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010).

21   Qualitative research has previously explored a plethora of organizational stressors that

22 are encountered by sport performers. From a research synthesis of 34 studies, Arnold and

23 Fletcher (2012) identified 640 distinct stressors that were labelled hierarchically in to the

24 following categories: leadership and personnel, cultural and team, logistical and

25 environmental, and performance and personal issues. A host of these stressors have been

1   linked to the identification of threat and harm appraisals (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2012),

2   negative emotional responses (e.g., Fletcher, Hanton, & Wagstaff, 2012b), and the enactment

3   of different coping behaviors (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2014). These findings have also

4   been complemented by quantitative research that has shown relationships between athletes'

5   perceptions of developmental, team, and cultural stressors within sport organizations and

6   negative affect (Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2017). Although the findings from both

7   methods have enabled the identification of organizational stress processes in sport and some

8   of their relationships, it is posited that these methods in isolation may limit our ability to

9   confidently develop tailored stress management programs for individuals and groups who

10   operate in culturally rich organizations (Nielsen et al., 2010). In this regard, the adoption of

11   mixed methods may facilitate a pragmatic stress auditing approach for developing stress

12   management programs for specific organizations (Bowling et al., 2012).

13   One of the key benefits of conducting a mixed method stress audit is to triangulate

14   understanding of attitudes from individuals and groups whose organizational roles may differ

15   (Mazzola, Schonfeld, & Spector, 2011). This is vital for establishing common stressful

16   incidents for specific individuals and target groups in an organization (Bowling et al., 2012).

17   In addition, by incorporating methods such as focus groups, individuals may be empowered

18   to collaboratively discuss their needs with other organizational members (Kohler & Munz,

19   2006). This is advantageous in developing stress management interventions at an individual-

20   and organizational-level, as members will have both individual and collective attitudes,

21   preferences and motives. Furthermore, participatory methods, which treat members as active

22   agents of change and encourage the commitment of management, are necessary (but not

23   sufficient) conditions for successful organizational interventions (Daniels, Gedikli, Watson,

24   Semkina, & Vaughn, 2017). This approach motivates groups to identify common issues and

25   design solutions. Without the participation of various personnel, a tailored program for

tackling organizational stress cannot be appropriately designed (Elo, Ervasti, Kuosma, &

Mattila, 2008).

To combat the challenges of gaining as many perspectives and recommendations from

organizational members as possible, researchers have called for greater use of mixed methods

(Elo et al., 2008; Mazzola et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2010) to facilitate triangulation and

complementarity of findings (Greene, 2008, Moran, Matthews, & Kirby, 2011). This is

important for exploring the existence of common organizational stress processes and

intervention recommendations that may not be easily achieved from the sole adoption of

quantitative or qualitative methods. Moreover, the incorporation of qualitative with

quantitative methods allows for understanding of contextual issues and what matters to

individuals in their own language (Daniels et al., 2017; Nielsen, Abildgaard, & Daniels,

2014). According to Bowling et al. (2012, p. 79), "research should give more attention to

developing techniques used to diagnose the need for stress interventions". The current

research seeks to address some of the conceptual challenges of stress audit models previously

used to inform the development of organizational programs. By adopting a mixed method,

the study attempts to understand sport performers' experiences of organizational stress in

greater depth from the perspective of various members (e.g., sport performers, coaches, staff).

This approach aims to explore the contextual and cultural complexities that are not explicitly

evident in current organizational stress audit models.

Taking these points together, the primary purpose of this study was to conduct a

mixed method organizational stress audit of competitive performers who operate within a

sport organization. A secondary purpose was to identify stress management recommendations

for performers and teams operating in this organization. The exploration of organizational

stress processes and recommendations may facilitate the future tailoring of both individual-

and organizational-level initiatives. This study makes a unique conceptual contribution to

auditing organizational stress, by offering a mixed method framework from which

organizational interventions in sport can be advanced.

Method

Research Design

A mixed method design was adopted for serving the following philosophical aims.

Firstly, the authors believe that it is important to integrate techniques that can more

thoroughly investigate a phenomenon of interest (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p. 286).

Gaining multiple sources of information from various individuals (e.g., sport performers,

staff) is fundamental for exploring the convergence *and* divergence (cf. Greene, 2008) of

organizational stress experiences for sport performers. Furthermore, the researchers sought to

educate and modify an organization's current practices regarding stress management. In doing

so, it was necessary to represent the democratic values and recommendations of

organizational members, to progress towards participatory action in the future. To achieve

this purpose, the study was founded on a pragmatist perspective with a critical realist

ontology (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) whilst employing methods that parallel understanding

of stress in organizations (Lazarus, 1991).

Participants and Procedure

The organizational sample ($N = 47$) consisted of staff (head coach, assistant coach,

sport science support, and administrative staff; $n = 7$) and a male professional rugby union

academy playing squad ($n = 40$). The ages of staff and rugby players ranged from 22 to 56

years ($M = 36.71$, $SD = 11.35$) and 15 to 19 years ($M = 17.13$, $SD = 0.97$) respectively. The

largely male sample (i.e., 98% male) represented multiple job roles of individuals who

operated on a full-time basis in this professional rugby union academy. The participating

organization was selected due to the successful profile of the organization, the consistently

high level of competition that the players and team operated at, and due to its close proximity

to the senior professional team's training facilities. The purpose of this academy was to

recruit, develop and support professional youth players' transition in to the senior team.

Following institutional ethical approval, managers and head coaches of sport organizations in

the United Kingdom were initially contacted by email and informed of the purposes and

requirements of the research being conducted. Once consent was provided by the manager of

the sport organization and its members, a concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was

followed, such that qualitative and quantitative stress audit data were collected concurrently

(Creswell & Piano Clark, 2011). Data collection began prior to the beginning of pre-season

training. This represented a period whereby most of the playing squad had not returned from

the previous end of season break. At this time, interviews and surveys were completed with

staff ($n = 7$) and key players ($n = 6$) from the playing squad who had returned early for pre-

season conditioning. Key players were identified by the head coach and assistant coach as

individuals who demonstrate leadership and have considerable input in to the team's

functioning and development. The benefit of this approach was that exclusive participation

was gained from key subgroups and decision makers who operate in distinct roles, and, hold

an influence in planning an organizational-level intervention (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004).

Once the remaining players had returned for pre-season training, it was identified that

the squad was characterized as three sub-groups (e.g., under-17, under-18, and under-19 age

groups). Sub-groups are important for delimiting future intervention programs to those most

at risk of organizational strain (Bradley & Sutherland, 1994). The existence of organizational

stressors and outcomes may also be apparent for specific players who share similar needs

(Briner & Reynolds, 1999). Thus, to promote discussion on the common issues that sub-

groups experience (Krueger & Casey, 2009), three focus groups with survey data collection

were steered with the remaining participants ($n = 34$). The focus group approach contrasts

that to previous research on organizational stress in sport, which has often relied on

employing face-to-face interviews or diary methods (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2012a; Didymus &

Fletcher, 2012). The benefit of conducting focus groups in organizational settings is that team

members who are familiar with one another are able to openly share ideas and discuss

sensitive issues like stress in a comfortable and relaxed setting (Liamputtong, 2011).

In comparison to one-to-one interviews or diary methods, focus groups enable cultural

insights in to the sources of individual and group behaviors (Morgan, 1996). This is highly

relevant when exploring the social and contextual complexities of organizational stress

(Daniels, Harris, & Briner, 2004). In organizational contexts, focus groups have proven

beneficial in understanding and identifying recommendations to tackle barriers to well-being

and productivity. Moreover, focus groups can help to determine which recommendations are

easiest to adopt and easiest for organizations to enforce (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 12).

Interviews, focus groups and survey data collection were conducted face-to-face by the first

author. Before the completion of each interview and survey, participants were given written

and verbal information as to the purposes and outcomes of the study. Following assurances of

voluntary participation, anonymity, and the freedom to withdraw at any stage, participants

had the opportunity to ask questions before completing an informed consent form.

Interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide was initially used to facilitate

each session. Each interview and focus group took place in a private meeting room at the

training ground of the organization. The interview guide was generated from a range of

sources. In line with previous stress audits that have been conducted in organizational

psychology (e.g., Biron et al., 2006; Rick et al., 2001), the main components of the stress

audit included: an exploration of organizational stressors, appraisals and coping behaviors,

stress outcomes, and stress management recommendations. In addition, question content was

devised based on relevant research conducted in sport (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Fletcher et

al., 2006) and organizational psychology (Dewe et al., 2010). Prior to beginning interviews,

participants were verbally informed that they will be asked about players' experiences of the

academy environment and how they perceived various issues that occurred. This included

providing examples of organizational stressors (e.g., the training environment, player and

staff relationships) using Arnold and Fletcher's (2012) taxonomic classification. The

interview guide began with introductory questions (e.g., Could you tell me about something

that has happened within the academy recently which has gone well?). These questions

intended to build rapport and provide time for the participants to consider the area in question

(Silverman, 2014). The main questions explored players' exposure to organizational stressors

in their environment and suggestions for improving organizational functioning and

performance. Where relevant, probes were offered to consider how the players attempted to

appraise or cope with any issues that arose (e.g., What did you tend to think about when these

issues occurred? / How did you deal with that at the time?), and any potential outcomes that

occurred (e.g., How did you feel about these demands at the time? / What effect did that

have?). The same probes were reworded for coaches and staff, to allow for their perspective

on player's experiences of organizational stress. Finally, all participants were encouraged to

summarize their views and elaborate on any relevant issues. The first author then clarified the

participants' intervention recommendations for specific target groups and requested feedback

on the interview process.

Prior to the interviews being conducted, the guide was piloted with an amateur athlete

who operated in a separate organization. Subsequently, several questions were reworded to

enhance their clarity (Silverman, 2014). Additional questions were also integrated after

several themes emerged from attending a meeting at the sport organization (cf. Liamputtong,

2011). These themes related to communication, social support, decision making and time

management. The interviews and focus groups ranged from 52 to 96 minutes ($M = 69.30$, SD

$= 11.86$) and 63 to 79 minutes in duration ($M = 71.90$ min, $SD = 8.16$) respectively.

1   **Stress management survey.** At the end of each interview, players and staff were

2   asked to complete a short stress management survey (Bradley & Sutherland, 1994) which had

3   been adapted for the sport organization. This served the purpose of triangulating individuals'

4   interview responses and evaluating their readiness for developing stress management

5   programs (Nielsen, 2013). The survey presented a list of 14 possible intervention programs,

6   which included the following: building confidence; improved social support; managing

7   emotions positively; problem solving; relaxation training; team building; and team

8   performance appraisal systems. To outline what was meant by each survey term, examples of

9   psychological intervention techniques associated with each option were offered to the

10   participants. Players and staff were then asked to select one of three responses (yes / no /

11   don't know) to each of the following four statements: (1) I feel I would personally benefit

12   from; (2) I would personally participate in; (3) I feel that the academy would benefit from;

13   and (4) I would recommend the academy to participate in. The survey list was generated from

14   a pre-interview staff meeting and the stress management literature in sport (for a review, see

15   Rumbold et al., 2012). Participants were also encouraged to suggest additional programs that

16   may have emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

17   **Data Analysis**

18   Content analysis was deemed the most appropriate for interpreting the data for several

19   reasons. Firstly, it allows the exploration of interview transcripts and survey responses for

20   recurrent instances in relation to the research questions (Silverman, 2014). Secondly, it is

21   suitable for exploring common organizational processes from both interview and focus group

22   data (e.g., Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004). Thirdly, due to the multi-method nature of data

23   collection, a method of analysis was required to yield a 'typology' (Creswell & Piano Clark,

24   2011) that could triangulate and supplement the interpretation of findings from the interview

25   and survey data (Greene, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). During the initial stages, the

first author immersed himself in the data by adopting a reflective approach. This involved re-

reading post-interview notes that had been taken at the time of interviewing, listening to each

of the interview recordings to gain clarification of participant tones and meanings, and

reading and re-reading the written transcripts whilst noting initial ideas. Following this,

segments of quotes that represented similar meanings were inductively coded as raw-data

themes. Raw-data codes which represented common themes were grouped into lower-order

themes. These lower-order themes were then clustered into higher-order themes. In light of

established organizational stress frameworks (e.g., Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Dewe et al.,

2010; Fletcher et al., 2012a), the majority of higher-order themes were deductively clustered

into general dimensions.

Research Quality and Rigor

Integrative mixed method research requires a strong audit trail and reflexive stance to

be presented (Bergman, 2011). In line with Teddie and Tashakkori's (2009) criteria for

evaluating inference quality, a variety of steps were taken to maximize the *design quality* and

interpretive rigor. *Design quality* refers to the extent to which appropriate procedures have

been conducted to answer the research question(s). In this way, the study design was deemed

suitable for answering the purpose(s) of the research. Since the function of the research was

to develop a tailored organizational intervention, it was critical to triangulate participants'

stress management recommendations with players' experiences of organizational stress. The

authors were cognizant of implementing design components with the fidelity to capture

participants' perceptions of organizational stress processes and attitudes towards stress

management. In this way, the first author was diligent in devoting significant time and

thoroughness in conducting the interviews, focus groups and completion of surveys. A self-

reflexive diary was completed throughout the data collection and critical friends were used to

engage the first author in discussions regarding their positionality during the data collection

of interviews, focus groups and surveys. By gathering multiple types of qualitative and

quantitative data, we engaged dialogically with paradigm differences (Green, 2008) to

generate a more contextual understanding of organizational issues.

Interpretive rigor refers to how interpretations have been made in relation to the

results obtained (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). We attempted to adhere to interpretive

consistency by closely relating a large dataset of organizational stress processes in sport

performers with participant recommendations for future stress management interventions.

These stress processes and recommendations were interpreted on the basis of a large

organizational sample ($N = 47$), and, were consistent with relevant theories and frameworks

in this area (Fletcher et al., 2006; Dewe et al., 2010; Lazarus, 1991). Regarding the latter, the

conceptual contribution to organizational stress audit research should also be considered,

along with the extent to which the research is heuristically and practically significant for

empowering organizational members to engage in action or change. We present a multi-

vocality of quotations from different participants, to enable readers to consider whether they

reach similar conclusions. Interpretive conclusions are also evident where staff perceptions

complement players' experiences of organizational stress. Interpretive distinctiveness was

achieved by debriefing participants through presentation and discussion of the findings to

assess participants' agreements with the inferences made. Integrative efficacy was achieved

by comparing the inferences made regarding players' experiences of organizational stress

with the conclusions made in relation to player and staff intervention recommendations.

Finally, in considering the interpretive correspondence of the research, we feel that the

inferences made align to the purposes of conducting a stress audit of sport performers

operating in a sport organization and exploring intervention recommendations.

Results and Discussion

A total of 645 raw data themes emerged from the qualitative transcripts, which were

1   inductively abstracted into 186 lower-order themes and 76 higher-order themes. These

2   higher-order themes then formed 14 general dimensions which were deductively categorized

3   in to the following components of the organizational-level stress audit: organizational

4   stressors, cognitive appraisals and coping behaviors, organizational stressor outcomes, and

5   stress management recommendations. Tables 1 to 3 illustrate the higher-order themes and

6   general dimensions of each stress audit component. Example lower-order themes are also

7   provided for each higher-order theme. In addition, Table 4 displays participants' survey

8   responses in relation to offering recommendations for stress management programs. In view

9   of the quantity and wide ranging themes to emerge from the stress audit, space precludes an

10   exploration of all themes and their complexity. Therefore, a selection of quotes are provided

11   and discussed in relation to relevant literature.

12   **Organizational Stressors**

13   Consistent with a synthesis of organizational stressors in sport performers (Arnold &

14   Fletcher, 2012), the four general dimensions of organizational stressors were: leadership and

15   personnel issues, cultural and academy issues, logistical and environmental issues, and

16   performance and personal issues.

17   **Leadership and personnel issues.** Leadership and personnel issues, which were the

18   most frequently cited organizational stressors for players, consisted of the stressors that were

19   related to the direction and support of the organization. The higher-order themes within this

20   dimension were: *external expectations*, *feedback*, *referees*, *retention*, *support staff*, *coach*

21   *behaviors*, and *the coaches' personality and attitudes*. Within *external expectations*,

22   "coaches' expectations" for players to conform to the organization's core values (e.g., work

23   hard, learn quickly) was regularly cited as a key stressor for first year players: "I think the big

24   thing I noticed [when starting at the academy] was you had to learn quickly, the culture of the

25   club as well. I think the coaches are big on setting that culture, just coming in, working hard,

1 no excuses about a thing" (Player 6). "I think the expectation to develop quickly makes them

2 [players] stressed sometimes and they need to be able to just enjoy it a bit more … instead of

3 it just being drudgery, hard work, hard work you know (Staff 6)".

4   Within *feedback*, a common issue that contributed to a range of stressor outcomes was

5 "receiving negative feedback" from others. The following quote (Player 3) illustrates how

6 negative feedback can be harmful for decision making and team morale, and, how game

7 reviews may help to manage feedback:

8   At half time, the coaches scream and shout but it doesn't help if they pick out [blame]

9   individuals because the individuals are just going to think about that [making

10   mistakes] the next time they go out. Every decision the players make … Like, [a

11   coach] was just saying "All forwards played really well. Backs were ****" … Like,

12   yeah, have a scream and shout, kick a few bottles around but then talk about the game

13   properly … I think people after that game were pretty dejected for a couple of weeks.

14   **Cultural and academy issues.** Cultural and academy issues comprised the stressors

15 that were associated with the atmosphere and behavioral norms in the organization. The

16 higher-order themes within this dimension were: *academy atmosphere*, *communication*,

17 *cultural norms*, *players' personality and attitudes*, and *roles*. Within *academy atmosphere*,

18 one commonly cited raw data theme related to player year group "cliques in the squad". The

19 emergence of this theme supports previous research which has identified cliques as a

20 common organizational stressor encountered by sport performers (Fletcher et al., 2012a).

21 However, the specific structure of the current organization also gave rise to "academy

22 hierarchies", which are less reported in the extant literature. Hierarchies were visible

23 throughout the institution, as there were structured divisions between an academy and senior

24 team organization. Within the academy, the playing squad was divided in to three sub-groups

25 based on birth year. As the following quote illustrates from a group of second year players,

1   hierarchies and cliques in the squad were closely associated with a "culture of intimidation";

2   seen by many as a reason for poor communication between players:

3   They [first year players] need to be brought down a peg (Player 25) ... Yea, they think

4   they're all big timers (Player 24) … They don't ever speak to anyone else (Player 26).

5   I think that's the same with the third year [players] (Player 25) … I think they'll [first

6   year players] calm down when we [second year players] start the 'contact game'

7   [physical intimidation] with them (Player 23) [group laughter].

8   **Logistical and environmental issues.** Logistical and environmental issues

9   encapsulated the stressors that were associated with the organization's management of

10   training and competition. The higher order themes within this dimension were: *training*

11   *environment*, *competition environment*, *facilities and equipment*, *selection*, and *travel*. The

12   most cited themes were identified within *training environment*, which included a "lack of

13   individual development sessions" and "high training intensity". Whilst training environment

14   is a regularly encountered stressor for professional sport performers (Kristiansen, Murphy, &

15   Roberts, 2012; Nicholls, Backhouse, Polman, & McKenna, 2009), one explanation in this

16   specific organizational context is that there is a daily coach expectation for players to

17   demonstrate their skill improvement in training, to improve their chances of being selected to

18   the senior professional team. Within *facilities and equipment*, a number of players cited

19   "inadequate changing rooms" as a potential reason for poor communication between players

20   during training and competition. The following quote (Player 2) demonstrates how

21   "inadequate changing rooms" may negatively impact on communication between players:

22   I think something that is quite bad is our changing rooms. You've got a first year

23   changing room, a second year changing room, a third year changing room and there's

24   no one [squad] together … it's very much three separate changing rooms ... It comes

25   to a game situation where a first year needs to tell a third year something or vice versa

1   and they're hesitant to say it.

2   **Performance and personal issues.** Performance and personal issues consisted of the

3   stressors relating to a player's professional career and personal development. The higher-

4   order themes within this dimension were: *academy transitions*, *work-life interface*, *diet and*

5   *recovery*, *player injury*, and *finances*. Within *academy transitions*, "moving to the academy

6   to train", "transition to a higher standard of rugby", and "transition to a higher training

7   intensity" were seen to be key issues that were believed to advance or compromise a player's

8   career development. These themes are consistent with research highlighting the non-elite to

9   elite transition as a key stressor for sport performers (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012). In the current

10   study, *academy transitions* provided a richer account for why "cliques in the squad", "high

11   training intensity" and "fierce competition for selection" may be common issues. Player 1

12   describes the difficulties a player can face when moving to the academy to train:

13   It was a shock to the system to be honest … I mean there were times, like I was

14   waking up in the morning thinking, "do I really want to be here?" Quite a lot. I mean

15   I'm not playing rugby [not being selected], you've just moved away from home,

16   moved to a new place so sometimes my motivation levels were really, really low.

17   Some games [game days], like Saturday mornings in November when its absolutely

18   pissing it down [heavy rain] and you've got to get two buses in to town, two more

19   buses to the academy at six o'clock in the morning, and you're not playing [not being

20   selected]. It does get you down when you've moved away from home to be here.

21   **Cognitive Appraisals and Coping Behaviors**

22   The general dimensions for cognitive appraisals and coping behaviors were: cognitive

23   appraisals, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, reappraisal-focused coping,

24   and avoidance coping.

25   **Cognitive appraisals.** Cognitive appraisals consisted of the primary appraisals of

1   organizational stressors that players encountered. These primary appraisals reflected players'

2   evaluations of the personal significance of stressors in relation to the attainment of personal

3   goals or well-being (Lazarus, 1991). The higher-order themes in this dimension were: *threat*

4   *appraisals*, *benefit appraisals*, *challenge appraisals*, and *harm appraisals*. It was apparent

5   that players typically developed threat appraisals of various organizational stressors.

6   Although sport performers may appraise events as challenging (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012),

7   our results support the finding that organizational stressors are typically appraised by sport

8   performers as preventing the attainment of goals or positive well-being (Didymus & Fletcher,

9   2014). Specifically, it was perceived that players felt threatened by "making the transition to

10   professional rugby", "negative feedback", "asking for advice", "job uncertainty", "academy

11   hierarchies", "unfriendly teammates", and "competition for playing positions". The following

12   quotes from players and staff illustrate players' typical threat appraisals of players due to

13   competition for positions: "Who are these other lads?" … you're thinking, "Oh he's going to

14   take my position", you're talking about it for weeks (Player 37) … If anyone comes in at your

15   position you're going to think **** [feel threatened] (Player 32). There is definitely a

16   positional threat for the players. "If he's going to be my threat [for selection] then I'm going

17   to make sure I knock him down and keep him down as long as possible" (Staff 6).

18   **Problem-focused coping.** Problem-focused coping consisted of the behaviors that

19   were elicited to resolve stressors. It was evident that some players used a range of behaviors

20   and drew on resources, such as social support, to achieve coping functions, such as problem

21   solving. This supports research which has conceptualized coping behaviors and functions as

22   interrelated (Daniels, Beesley, Wimalasiri, & Cheyne, 2013; for a review, see Skinner, Edge,

23   Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). The higher-order themes within problem-focused coping were:

24   *increased effort*, *informational support*, *planning*, *talking to teammates*, *changing behavior*,

25   and *increased concentration*. One player (Player 3) explained how *planning* through

1   "practicing what if scenarios" in training was effective in dealing with opponents in games:

2   We [the playing team] knew we had a good line out [during the game] because we had

3   some good [training] sessions drilling the line out in a [practice] game environment …

4   I think those sessions were good because when we played [club], they needed a drop

5   goal to win and they had about 8 scrums. It was just the mentality [of working hard].

6   I think me and [teammate] hit 55 scrums one after the other, in one [training] session

7   … stuff like that is good and players will know what they can do [under pressure].

8   **Emotion-focused coping.** Emotion-focused coping captured the most frequently cited

9   behaviors that were used by players to manage or express their emotions. The higher-order

10   themes were: *receiving encouragement*, *seeking social support*, *visualization*, *creating tasks*,

11   *relaxation*, *self-talk*, and *acceptance*. The most common themes related to *receiving*

12   *encouragement*, which consisted of "encouragement from teammates", "encouragement from

13   staff", and "encouragement from house parents". Receiving emotional support from

14   teammates and coaches is a common resource used to cope in organizations (Kristiansen et

15   al., 2012). This is because social support offsets the negative effect of stressors on well-being

16   (Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1986). From the focus groups, it emerged that more experienced

17   players offered encouragement to help players manage their emotions:

18   I think I got [received] that [encouragement] actually, when I was a first year (Player

19   37). Yeah, in our first year [at the organization] there were a lot of third years

20   [players] for us to [receive] get help from. Like, if you looked nervous they would sit

21   down and say "don't worry, you'll be fine, you're here for a reason, they [the coaches]

22   wouldn't have chosen you otherwise" (Player 34).

23   **Reappraisal-focused coping.** Reappraisal-focused coping consisted of the behaviors

24   that were used by players to reappraise the relevance and importance of organizational

25   stressors. The higher-order themes were *self-rationalization* and *rationalizing with others*.

Rationalizing with others appeared to reflect a coping resource that was rarely adopted by

players. Moreover, the professional academy players in this study appeared to lack the

confidence to seek support from staff and teammates to help rationalize particular stressors.

In light of these findings, sport performers in this organization may benefit from the

development of greater support seeking behaviors to promote collaboratively reappraising

organizational demands. The following quote illustrates the influence of rationalizing with

physiotherapists to help a player (Player 1) re-appraise the significance of an injury:

> I had a small stress fracture in my left foot … for the first week I didn't really manage

> it very well … Then you kind of get your head around it and think that this could

> work in a positive way and that's due to [the support of] the coaches and

> physiotherapy team. They kind of put it into your mind all the positives you're going

> to get out of being injured at this time.

Avoidance coping. Avoidance coping consisted of the behaviors that were used to

actively avoid solving problems or managing emotions. The higher-order themes were:

behavioral avoidance, *blocking*, *denial*, and *substance abuse*. Although the function of

avoidance coping is believed to be maladaptive for long-term well-being, it could be adaptive

in the short-term (Kristiansen et al., 2012); however, this may depend on the behaviors

enacted to fulfill this coping function (Skinner et al., 2003). Although a limited number of

themes were cited, academy staff reported a range of avoidance behaviors commonly

displayed by players, such as "lying to avoid conflict", "denial over incurring an injury" and

"drinking alcohol to disengage from having their professional contract terminated".

Organizational Stressor Outcomes

Organizational stressor outcomes refer to the symptoms of exposure to demands. The

four general dimensions were: emotional responses, intrapersonal outcomes, and performance

-related outcomes.

Emotional responses. Emotional responses consisted of a wide range of *negative emotions* and *positive emotions*. The most highly cited lower-order themes were "anxiety", "anger", and "fatigue". This finding is consistent with previous research that has explored emotional responses to organizational-related demands in elite (Arnold & Fletcher, 2015; Arnold et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2012b) and professional sport performers (Nicholls et al., 2009). This can be explained in so far that anxiety and anger represent a basic set of states by which threat and harm appraisals are commonly associated (Lazarus, 1999). From the interviews, it was evident that the academy had bred a culture of fear amongst the players, with anxiety being a typical response to "receiving negative feedback from others" and the formation of "academy hierarchies". In addition, players typically experienced intense anxiety from selection stressors such as "call ups [to the senior squad] at short notice": "All of a sudden you need to be on the bench for the first [senior] team and then you've got 5 or 6 days to learn all of the calls [tactics] and you think ******* hell" (Player 6).

Intrapersonal outcomes. Intrapersonal outcomes consisted of the organizational stressor outcomes that were associated with a player's cognitive functioning. The higher-order themes were: *confidence*, *de-motivation*, *concentration*, *decision making,* and *sleep*. Both players and staff suggested that "reduced confidence" is experienced primarily by first year players, who are attempting to adapt to *academy transitions* (e.g., "moving to the academy to train") and *cultural norms* (e.g., "negative motivational climate"). In some cases, it was acknowledged that intrapersonal outcomes were often a result of negative emotional responses to specific stressors. The following quote by a coach (Staff 6) illustrates the collective consequences of a negative motivational climate, which can lead to heightened levels of anxiety and reduced confidence for players:

We've got two small guys and the motivation [from a coach] is constantly, "You're too small for this game, I don't know why you're here, you might as well go home

now" … the lads [players] just cower like this [shy away] and don't say anything back

... So that's why when it comes to situations which need somebody to be confident

and speak up they won't do it because they fear they'll just get ridiculed. When things

have been shouted at them on the touchline you can see it [in their body language],

just like, "oh ****", heads down, it really affects them, they won't turn around and

say, "Okay, I made a **** up [a mistake] but I'll put it right", in response to "You're

******* coming off if you do that again! [shouting]".

Performance-related outcomes. The higher-order themes within this general

dimension were: *communication*, *individual performance*, *team performance*, and *retention*.

Within *individual performance*, "reduced skill development" was considered a consequence

from training-related stressors, such as a "lack of individualized sessions" and "longer

training sessions". In addition, players spoke of making technical and tactical errors in

training due to a fear of receiving further negative feedback from coaches. Players and staff

also felt that the organization could consider reducing the longer duration of some training

sessions, which are often counterproductive to concentration and skill development: "I saw it

several times last year … I've done 45 minutes [coaching], it's been quality intense stuff but

[coach] does another 45 minutes on line outs and scrums. The lads are just exhausted and it's

counterproductive [for skill development]" (Staff 3). "Rather than doing an hour and a half

session, do two 45 minute sessions where it's just detail … Really intense … And then you're

not [fatigued], because towards the end of sessions, you get really tired and then your

concentration goes" (Player 2).

Stress Management Recommendations

In line with organizational stress management frameworks (Dewe et al., 2010;

Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), participants provided a series of organizational-level and

individual-level recommendations to maximize sport performers' well-being and performance

1   development. Figure 1 illustrates the target groups by which stress management initiatives

2   were recommended throughout the organization. Higher-order themes are presented for each

3   target group, along with example lower-order themes. To corroborate these interview

4   responses, stress management survey recommendations were also completed at the end of

5   each interview (see Table 4). These survey responses reflected the average proportion of

6   players and staff that believed them and the organization would benefit from and participate

7   in particular stress management programs to facilitate players' ability to manage

8   organizational stress in the future.

9   **Organizational-level recommendations.** Organizational-level interventions are

10   typically developed to remove or modify specific organizational characteristics that

11   individuals and groups encounter, such as stressors (Dewe et al., 2010).The fourteen higher-

12   order themes within organizational-level recommendations were: *communication channels*;

13   *facilities management*; *work appraisals*; *talent development*; *game reviews*; *game*

14   *preparation*; *reflective practice*; *team cohesion*; *time management*; *training structure*; *team*

15   *goal setting*; *team problem solving*; and, *professionalism*. Within these themes, the most

16   frequently suggested recommendations were to: organize more team socials for all academy

17   players and staff to attend, integrate more regular team analysis of games, involving all

18   academy players and coaching staff; incorporate varied training sessions involving the

19   commitment of all academy players and staff; and, encourage communication between the

20   players and all academy and senior team staff. These initiatives were considered important

21   due to the aforesaid stressors relating to poor communication between players and members

22   of the organization, high training intensities, fatigue, the existence of academy hierarchies,

23   and, cliques in the playing squad. The need to address these stressors was supported by a

24   series of survey recommendations (see Table 4). In particular, team building was suggested

25   by many of the academy players ($n = 39$, 98%) and supported by some staff ($n = 3$, 42%).

1   Moreover, building confidence was cited by players ($n = 32$, 81%) and staff ($n = 4$, 61%) as a

2   program that they believed academy players would all benefit from and participate in as an

3   academy. Problem solving at a group and individual-level was also suggested by players ($n =$

4   30, 76%), with 4 out of 7 staff believing that players would benefit from this program.

5   **Individual-level recommendations.** Individual-level interventions are typically

6   developed to enable individuals to better appraise, respond and cope with organizational

7   stressors (Dewe et al., 2010). The seven higher-order themes within this dimension were:

8   *senior first team exposure*; *mentoring*; *coping*; *goal setting*; *trust*; *coach feedback*; and,

9   *parental education*. Within these higher-order themes, the most commonly cited lower-order

10   recommendations were to: modify negative appraisals for first and second year players,

11   encourage problem solving and decision making to first year players, raise coach awareness

12   of providing varying methods of feedback to players, and optimize confidence for first year

13   players. The education of coping efficacy for less experienced players was deemed

14   particularly important. This was explained in so far that first year players, who are making an

15   amateur to professional sport transition, often perceive their environment to be intimidating.

16   Moreover, it was suggested that players struggle to cope with high training intensities and

17   receiving negative feedback. The survey data also indicated that players (78%) and staff

18   (100%) believed that players would benefit from coping education.

19   One noticeable incongruence between the interview and survey recommendations

20   obtained was players' need for improved social support. From the survey data, 24 out of 40

21   players (60%) and 2 out of 7 staff (29%) felt that players would benefit from improved social

22   support. However, the interview and focus group data suggested that some players already

23   seek and receive different forms of support from teammates and staff. A recommendation

24   from staff suggested improving social support could be achieved by raising coach awareness

25   of feedback methods and educating parents on methods of support. Conversely, one member

1   of staff (Staff 5) argued the following: "This academy is like no other academy in the country

2   in the different levels of support provided to players". From the interviews and survey

3   responses it was also apparent that staff were keen to support the design and delivery of stress

4   management programs for their players, but were less interested in participating in any of

5   these programs alongside the players. This is an important applied consideration for the

6   development of organizational programs, since the effectiveness of such initiatives may be

7   largely dependent on the evidence of key decision makers' readiness for change, support for

8   and engagement in the programs (Nielsen, 2013).

9   **General Discussion**

10   The primary purpose of this study was to undertake a mixed method organizational

11   stress audit of competitive performers who operate in a sport organization. A secondary

12   purpose was to identify future stress management recommendations to maximize performers'

13   well-being and performance development. Informed by a transactional stress approach (Dewe

14   et al., 2010; Lazarus, 1991, 1999), the findings reveal a number of common organizational

15   stressors encountered by sport performers who operate in this sport institution. These findings

16   support the identification of themes identified in sport performers across a range of

17   competitive levels (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Kristiansen, Murphy, & Roberts, 2012;

18   Nicholls, Backhouse, Polman, & McKenna, 2009). In this organizational context, many

19   stressors (e.g., training demands) were often a by-product of encountering other demands

20   (e.g., academy transitions). Moreover, a culture of intimidation and a negative motivational

21   climate were linked to commonly developed appraisals and coping behaviors. In line with

22   stress theory (Lazarus, 1999), these player appraisals and coping behaviors were related to

23   emotional, intrapersonal and performance outcomes.

24   A wide range of stress management recommendations were also identified for specific

25   groups in this organization, with the aim of directly or indirectly helping sport performers to

1 better manage their experiences of organizational stress in the future. An overarching

2 message was that players, and to some degree staff, would take part in individual- *and*

3 organizational-level stress management programs. At an individual-level, player coping

4 efficacy is important, as the behaviors used to achieve coping functions may be adaptive for

5 well-being in specific contexts, but maladaptive in others (Daniels et al., 2013; Skinner et al.,

6 2003). This is sensible given the mission of the current organization, which is to retain

7 academy players who demonstrate an ability to cope with professional sport and its demands.

8 At an organizational-level, it was perceived that the institution should integrate initiatives to

9 enhance team cohesion and communication channels, vary training stimulus, and to

10 incorporate reviews of competitive games. Such organizational-level programs are believed

11 to be the most proactive solution to managing stress (Dewe et al., 2010), as they aim to

12 prevent player strain from occurring by modifying structures and environmental conditions

13 (cf. Briner & Reynolds, 1999). Although support for their efficacy has been equivocal

14 (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), participatory stress audits are arguably a prerequisite for

15 effective interventions, as the sport performers who may benefit from such programs are also

16 those recommending their creation (cf. Nielsen et al., 2010).

17   A strength of the current stress audit was the sample size ($N = 47$) and sampling of

18 varying organizational members. This was important to illustrate how players' stress

19 experience may also be perceived by staff and jointly developed by common player attitudes,

20 cultural norms, contagion, and managed by a range of coping resources. Despite these

21 strengths, the sample sizes for some of the focus groups (i.e., $n = 15$) was considered a

22 limitation, which could have compromised an appropriate level of participant contribution.

23 Further, the data yielded from large focus group samples may not have enabled individuals to

24 represent their views as clearly as individual interviews might. Although we were mindful of

25 adhering to focus group guidelines for organizational research (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004),

the specific context determined that we had to complete interviews at times that were most

convenient to the organization. It is possible that the development of steering groups

comprising a mixture of sport performers and staff could have been applied to identify clearly

agreed motives for tackling sport performers' experiences of organizational stress. However,

given the identification of potentially threatening cultural norms, steering groups may have

been counterproductive. In the current study, conducting focus groups with player sub-groups

was necessary for delimiting future interventions to groups who may be most at risk of strain

(Bradley & Sutherland, 1994). We acknowledge that the analysis of group experiences makes

it difficult to assess the coping effectiveness of particular stressors for specific performers.

Follow-up auditing is therefore recommended to further inform intervention development.

The findings from this study suggest that organizational stress management in sport is

an area worthy of future research. While attempting to advance the conceptual framework

and methods used to understand organizational stress, we concur that "research should give

more attention to developing techniques used to diagnose the need for stress interventions"

(Bowling et al., 2012, p. 79). As the current study indicates, not all stressors are maladaptive

for sport performers' well-being and performance. Researchers considering a mixed method

approach to stress auditing could consider a longitudinal examination, using a combination of

regular steering group meetings, interviews, diaries, observations, and surveys. A blend of

these approaches will likely result in greater exposure to the organizational environment and

may capture an accurate reality of day-to-day functioning. Comprehensive audits such as the

aforesaid may be more time consuming for organizations. Yet, the benefits of conducting a

detailed, participative, and proactive approach to stress management are likely to outweigh

the time taken and the relatively minimal cost that could be incurred to improve the well-

being and performance of sport performers (cf. Briner & Reynolds, 1999).

There are a number of practical challenges when conducting applied research in sport

1   organizations. In conducting stress audits that are theoretically founded (e.g., Lazarus, 1991),

2   psychologists should identify the stress processes and common issues that need solving for

3   those individuals (e.g., players) and groups (e.g., sub-group teams) who need the most

4   support (Bowling et al., 2012; Nielsen et al., 2010). This is vital for prioritizing whether

5   organizational-, individual-level interventions, or an amalgamation of the two is necessary

6   (Giga et al., 2003). Organizational-level programs may be the priority for modifying

7   organizational stressors, such as cultural norms. Where stressors cannot be removed or

8   reduced, individual-level programs such as modifying cognitive appraisals are also

9   appropriate for facilitating well-being (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). In reality, studying

10   sport performers' organizational experiences and recommendations for intervention

11   development in context is not straightforward, particularly when there may be incongruence

12   between performers and key stakeholders as to the main issues that need prioritizing. In this

13   regard, sport psychologists have a challenging but important role in encouraging stakeholders

14   to provide support for the necessary interventions to be designed and implemented. Without

15   such commitment, it is likely that sport performers will perceive a lack of interest on the part

16   of stakeholders in their well-being. This may subsequently lead to negative performer

17   perceptions of the organizational climate in which they operate (cf. Dewe et al., 2010).

18   In conclusion, this stress audit makes a conceptual contribution by unearthing

19   contextual (e.g., non-normative transitions) and cultural complexities (e.g., political

20   hierarchies) that are not explicitly evident in the organizational psychology models used to

21   inform interventions. Organizational interventions which aim to modify the stressors

22   encountered, or reduce their impact on performers' well-being, are more likely to be effective

23   if a stress audit is rigorously adopted and integrated in an organization's overall management

24   strategy. Although some challenges exist for undertaking an audit, the prevention and

25   management of stress should be a joint responsibility between sport performers and

1   stakeholders (Dewe et al., 2010; Fletcher et al., 2006); one that may hold great promise for

2   optimizing well-being, performance, and organizational productivity.

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Table 1. Organizational stressors encountered by professional academy players

Lower-order themes (examples only)	Higher-order themes	General Dimension
Coaches' expectations	External expectations	
Receiving negative feedback	Feedback	
Poor referee decisions	Referees	
Job uncertainty	Retention	Leadership and Personnel Issues
Ambiguous injury diagnoses	Support staff	
Conflicting coaching styles	Coach behaviors	
Unapproachable coaches	The coaches' personality and attitudes	
Academy hierarchies	Academy atmosphere	
Poor communication between players	Communication	
Culture of Intimidation	Cultural norms	Cultural and Academy Issues
Hostile teammates	Players' personality and Attitudes	
Role ambiguity	Roles	
Lack of individual development sessions	Training environment	
Fluctuating game preparation	Competition environment	
Inadequate changing rooms	Facilities and equipment	Logistical and Environmental issues
Fierce competition for selection	Selection	
Long away game journeys	Travel	
Moving to the academy to train	Academy transitions	
Balancing academy and education	Work-life interface	
Lack of food preparation	Diet and recovery	Performance and Personal Issues
Isolation from being injured	Player injury	
Lack of finances	Finances	

Table 2. Cognitive appraisals and coping behaviors of professional academy players

Lower-order themes (examples only)	Higher-order themes	General Dimension
Player threat appraisals of making the transition to professional rugby	Threat appraisals	Cognitive appraisals
Benefit appraisals of the academy training program	Benefit appraisals	
Challenge appraisals of player injury	Challenge appraisals	
Harm appraisals of negative feedback	Harm appraisals	
Working harder due to feedback	Increased effort	Problem-focused coping
Instructional support from teammates	Informational support	
Practicing 'what if scenarios'	Planning	
Talking to teammates to solve issues	Talking to teammates	
Working on changing technique	Changing behavior	
Focusing	Increased concentration	
Encouragement from teammates	Receiving encouragement	Emotion-focused coping
Talking to teammates for support	Seeking social support	
Imagery	Visualization	
Creating tasks to prevent boredom	Creating tasks	
Listening to music	Relaxation	
Self-talk	Self-talk	
Accepting selection decisions	Acceptance	
Rationalizing negative feedback	Self-rationalization	Reappraisal-focused coping
Re-evaluating injury with physiotherapists	Rationalizing with others	
Avoiding conflict	Behavioral avoidance	Avoidance coping
Trying to forget mistakes	Blocking	
Player denial over injury	Denial	
Drinking alcohol prior to being released by the academy	Substance abuse	

Table 3. Organizational stressor outcomes experienced by professional academy players

Lower-order themes (examples only)	Higher-order themes	General Dimension
Anger	Negative emotions	Emotional outcomes
Excitement	Positive emotions	
Reduced confidence	Confidence	Intrapersonal outcomes
De-motivated	De-motivation	
Reduced concentration	Concentration	
Players being unable to make appropriate decisions	Decision making	
Lack of sleep	Sleep	
Reduced team communication	Communication	Performance-related outcomes
Making mistakes	Individual performance	
Reduced team performance	Team performance	
Players being released	Retention	

Table 4. Survey recommendations for organizational stress management

	I feel I would personally benefit from …	I would personally participate in …	I feel that the academy would benefit from …	I would recommend the academy to use …
Team building	38P, 2S	40P, 4S	40P, 3S	39P, 4S
Building confidence	28P, 3S	34P, 4S	34P, 5S	34P, 5S
Coping with pressures	26P, 1S	32P, 4S	35P, 5S	31P, 5S
Problem solving	28P, 4S	28P, 5S	33P, 4S	32P, 4S
Relaxation training	29P, 3S	32P, 4S	32P, 4S	26P, 4S
Team performance appraisals	29P, 1S	28P, 5S	33P, 4S	28P, 4S
Time management	26P, 1S	29P, 4S	32P, 4S	28P, 4S
Assertiveness training	25P, 3S	28P, 4S	33P, 3S	28P, 3S
Managing emotions positively	24P, 4S	29P, 5S	30P, 4S	24P, 3S
Psychology rehabilitation for injured players	25P, 2S	29P, 3S	30P, 4S	26P, 4S
Challenging stressful thinking	24P, 3S	28P, 5S	31P, 3S	25P, 3S
Self-regulating teams	25P, 1S	28P, 3S	28P, 2S	25P, 2S
Improved social support	21P, 1S	23P, 4S	30P, 2S	25P, 3S
Resolving conflict	18P, 3S	24P, 4S	26P, 3S	23P, 3S

Note. $N = 47$, P = the number of recommendations from academy players ($n = 40$); S = the number of recommendations from academy staff ($n = 7$).

	I feel I would personally benefit from …	I would personally participate in …	I feel that the academy would benefit from …	I would recommend the academy to use …

ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Target: The Organization

• Communication Channels	Encourage communication between players and staff
• Facilities Management	Restructuring of the changing rooms
• Work Appraisals	More regular player appraisals

Target: Academy Staff

• Talent Development	Revisit the talent development process

Target: Academy Players and Staff

• Game Reviews	Regular team analysis of games
• Game Preparation	Food preparation for games
• Reflective Practice	Encourage individual reflective practice
• Team Cohesion	More team socials
• Time Management	Optimize time management
• Training Structure	Incorporate varied training sessions

Target: The Academy Squad

• Team Goal Setting	Performance profiling
• Team Problem Solving	Simulating 'chaos' in training
• Professionalism	Educating player professionalism

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Target: Academy Players

• First Team Exposure	Expose players to senior team
• Mentoring	Encourage player mentoring

Target: First and Second Year Academy Players

• Coping	Modify negative appraisals

Target: First Year Academy Players

• Goal setting	Optimize confidence
• Trust	Strengthen trust in teammates

Target: Academy Coaches and Player Parents

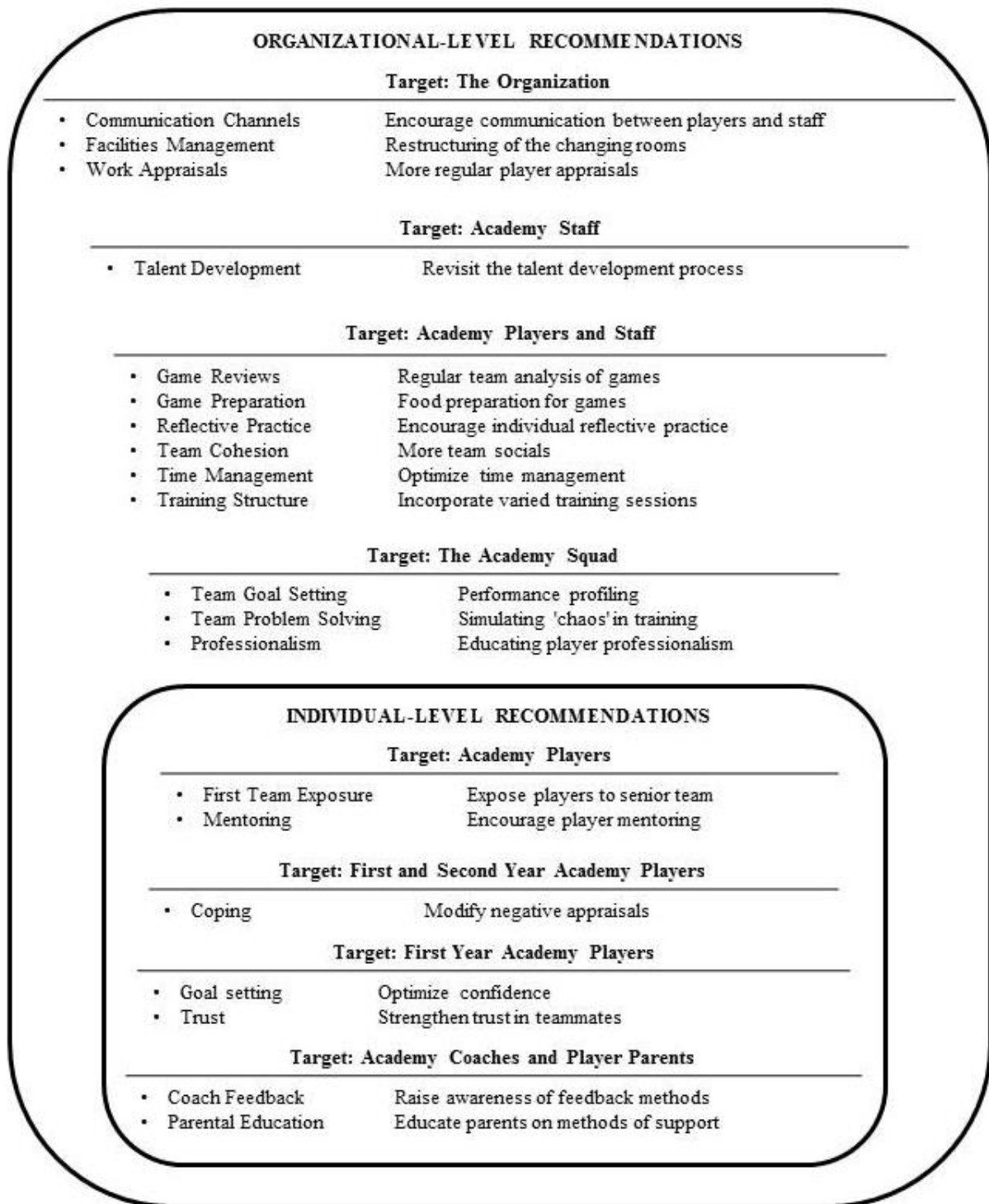|	
• Coach Feedback	Raise awareness of feedback methods
• Parental Education	Educate parents on methods of support

Figure 1. Organizational- and individual-level stress management recommendations