

Exploring the perceived benefits of engaging with Spotlight personality profiling in performance domains

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Spotlight Profile is a contemporary personality profiling tool developed in elite sport that focuses on fostering adaptability. It has been increasingly deployed by sport psychology consultants in sport and other organizational settings, yet how end-users perceive the tool's use to benefit their performance is not yet known. Using semi-structured interviews, we explored the experiences of 16 individuals who have engaged with Spotlight Profile as part of a performance-based intervention across elite sport and a series of other domains (e.g. business, education, health). Thematic analysis led to the development of seven themes, which included: self-awareness, contextual sensitivity, positive outlook, adaptability, self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and team effectiveness. These findings highlight the multiple benefits which may be experienced by engaging with Spotlight Profile and offer a framework to guide the potential areas for development when using personality profiling in applied practice.
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THE INCREASING systematisation of high performance sport has corresponded with a proportionate increase in Sport Psychology Consultants (SPCs) using methods and techniques more often seen in organizational settings (Wagstaff & Quartiroli, 2020). A prominent organizational practice adopted by SPCs is the use of personality profiling (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017), with Insights Discovery (Cecil, 2014) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTi; Shambrook, 2009) examples of tools used by SPCs in an attempt to enhance performers' awareness of self and others. More recently, Spotlight Profile (Spotlight hereafter) has also gained traction in professional and Olympic/Paralympic sport within the United Kingdom (UK) (e.g. Crampton, 2021).

Developed by SPCs at Mindflick as a novel approach to personality profiling, Spotlight focuses on the development of psychological adaptability, a characteristic linked to

consistent development and success in both sport (e.g. Holland et al., 2010) and other performance settings (e.g. Bartone et al., 2019), and is designed more specifically for those working in performance settings. However, despite an increasing popularity amongst SPCs, research has not yet explored how interacting with Spotlight may benefit performers. Thus, whilst literature offers some insight into how practitioners have used various personality profiling tools in their practice (e.g. MBTi), the alternative theoretical foundations offered by Spotlight means the tool warrants its own examination. Further, the concentration of existing research on personality profiling in performance domains has tended to only focus on practitioner experiences and reflective accounts (e.g. Cecil, 2014; Cotterill, 2012), and so does not systematically explore how they have been received by athletes and performers (i.e. end-users). Indeed, an important yet underexplored source of

information for understanding the impact of personality profiling tools is the experiences of end-users (Moyle & Hackston, 2018). Thus, the main aim of this study is to explore how individuals who have engaged with Spotlight perceive their experiences to have been beneficial to them in their pursuit of performance and development.

Personality profiling in sport

The use of personality profiling today is widespread and is seen as a fundamental component of talent recruitment and development in many organisational settings. Unsurprisingly, due to their popularity, the use of such tools has also made their way into the sporting domain as SPCs have sought ways to update their practice due to the increasing systemization within sport (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017). Consequently, personality profiling tools, such as MBTi and Insights Discovery have been employed by SPCs as they explore ways to enhance performance in a sporting context (e.g. Cecil, 2014; Cotterill, 2012, 2017; Shambrook, 2009). These applied accounts primarily report using such tools to help athletes and performers develop self-awareness and build their understanding of others in order to facilitate the development of effective relationships and team effectiveness¹.

For example, Shambrook reported using MBTi as part of a team based intervention with Olympic rowers, with the aim of: (a) familiarising individuals with their own personalities, (b) building understanding of how these differences may affect interpersonal dynamics, and (c) raise awareness of how such differences may appear under pressure. This was done via the delivery of an interactive group session to help individuals understand their own personality and how this may show up under pressure, before exploring potential differences within the squad to understand how these

differences may affect squad harmony. This resulted in further discussion around how individual's may better perform in different contexts and develop relationships within the squad to build greater cohesion. Shambrook reflects on how this work provided an interactive way of focusing on the dynamics between individuals and resulted in immediate benefits for the team as they used the tool to have conversations about learning and communication styles to better frame messages and resolve potential personality clashes within the team in a proactive way.

While such practitioner accounts have provided valuable insights into the way in which personality profiling tools have been used by SPCs to develop awareness of how personality differences may exist between self and others, these studies have tended to remain anecdotal in nature and have primarily focused on practitioner's own accounts of intervention delivery. Furthermore, important considerations must be made by SPCs when using such tools, with Shambrook (2009) reflecting on the need to warn others against the possible 'typing' that may come from the use of tools which have theoretical roots based in Jungian typologies. Such warnings are further emphasised by Collins and Cruickshank (2017), who call for SPCs to be aware of issues relating to both tool development (e.g. is the tool based on an appropriate theoretical base?) and tool application (e.g. is the tool appropriately designed for the intervention purpose?) when making decisions on whether to use such tools in their practice. They make the specific point that personality profiling tools are often developed in an organizational context (and hence use business-focused language) with the aim of increasing self-awareness. They therefore question whether they can be uncritically applied to facilitate the development of other performance-related characteristics.

¹ For critical reviews of the use of Jungian-based personality profiling tools, see Collins and Cruickshank (2017), and McCrae and Costa (1989).

This means SPCs should consider the original purpose for which tools were developed when making decisions around the appropriateness of tools in applied practice so that they can guard against the dangers of maladaptive practice and ensure, in selecting a tool, it is designed to address the needs of the clients they are working with.

Background to Spotlight

Spotlight is an approach to personality profiling that has recently been developed and utilised by SPCs in the UK. It is one of the first personality profiling tools to be designed by SPCs, and so originate directly from experiences in the many high-performance settings SPCs now work (e.g. business, education, healthcare; Uttmelas, 2021; Sly et al., 2020). This means that unlike alternative personality profiling tools, it is specifically designed to develop performance through enhancing individual adaptability, defined by Martin et al. (2012) as ‘an individual’s capacity to constructively regulate psycho-behavioural functions in response to new, changing, and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions and situations’. This focus on performance has seen it become more widely used by SPCs within their practice, both within sport (Crampton, 2021), as well as the other disciplines within which they may operate. Furthermore, the use of Spotlight also attempts to tackle the issues typically levelled at other personality profiling tools, attempting to: (a) overcome tool development issues by being underpinned by modern theories of personality; and (b) overcome issues with tool application by focusing on the development of performance through an emphasis on adaptability and performance-related concepts (e.g. pressure, resilience, confidence).

Conceptually, Spotlight comprises two distinct models that relate to an individual’s *mindset* (COPE model) and *behavioural style* (FLEX model) preferences, which are underpinned by their own corresponding theories of personality. It does

not attempt to explain the entirety of someone’s personality, but, instead, is designed to aid and enhance understanding around an individual’s natural preferences before prompting discussion around how they may need to adapt their mindset or behavioural style to effectively navigate different situations. The COPE model of mindset is grounded in aspects of Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST; Corr & McNaughton, 2012; Gray & McNaughton, 2000), which offers a neuropsychological basis from which to understand personality. Within RST, individual differences in personality can be explained by two orthogonal systems – one which accounts for an individual’s sensitivity to reward and another which accounts for sensitivity to threat. COPE brings these two systems together to form two intersecting axes, and thus presents four distinct mindset descriptions: Contained (i.e. low sensitivity to both reward and threat), Optimistic (i.e. high sensitivity to reward, low sensitivity to threat), Prudent (i.e. low sensitivity to reward, high sensitivity to threat) and Engaged (i.e. high sensitivity to both reward and threat). Alongside this, the FLEX model of behavioural style is based on the Big Five personality domains of Agreeableness and Extraversion, which are possibly the only two domains of the Big Five where both high *and* low ratings could be facilitative to performance achievement, depending on the context (e.g. Judge et al., 1999). These two personality domains are combined to form the two axes of the FLEX model, creating four different behavioural style preferences: Forceful (external, task focused), Logical (internal, task focused), Empathic (internal, people focused), and eXpressive (external, people focused). Both of these models have undergone extensive psychometric testing for both their underlying validity and reliability (for summary, see Ong, 2021).

These models of specific personality constructs are then grounded within the evidence-based philosophical beliefs that personality is adaptable (e.g. Cook, 2016;

Fleeson, 2001; Tett & Burnett, 2003). This means that SPCs can, in theoretical terms, use the tool to help end-users grow their ability to temporarily adapt to different situations – something thought to be necessary in maintaining high-levels of performance across changing contexts and situations (e.g. Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Practically speaking, this is explored via an initial debrief of the Spotlight report in which an accredited practitioner emphasises how an individual is a combination of all four preferences on each of the mindset and behavioural style frameworks, with their preferences being highlighted by the weight of which each one appears in ‘the Spotlight’. This allows them to use the report to inform individual and team-based interventions designed to develop the ability to adapt to different contexts (Burnell et al., 2021). Such thinking is a departure from the Jungian typology upon which many personality profiling tools (e.g. MBTi, Insights Discovery) are currently based upon (for a full description of Jungian typology see Myers, 1962) – a theoretical basis which has been susceptible to maladaptive practices and/or interpretation, such as personality typing (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017). This means Spotlight may offer a theoretical basis which makes it more appropriate for moving personality profiling from an exercise which raises awareness of ‘personality type’ to one that can help individuals develop their ability to adapt how they think or behave when faced with different challenges or contexts.

Present research

These theoretical considerations mean that Spotlight overcomes some of the tool development and application issues (i.e. questions over theoretical and practical application; see above) outlined by Collins and Cruickshank (2017). However, it is less clear how the tool is experienced by the performers engaging with the tool. While practitioner accounts demonstrate evidence for the utility of personality profiles, including Spot-

light, in their practice (e.g. Crampton, 2021; Shambrook, 2009), there remains a lack of evidence that details how performers perceive interventions that use such tools to be beneficial to their performance and development. This is an important source of evidence when deciding the appropriateness of such tools for the context in which SPCs work (Moyle & Hackston, 2018). Therefore, this present study interviewed 16 individuals who had engaged with Spotlight as part of a performance-based intervention delivered by a SPC, with the main aim of understanding how they perceive their experiences to have been beneficial in their pursuit of performance and development. This is in line with previous research that has investigated the utility of interventions that have initially been developed in applied practice (e.g. Ludlam et al., 2017), and it is hoped will provide SPCs with evidence of how using Spotlight may address the needs of their clients, and so help them to make more informed decisions around if and when to use it in practice.

Methods

Theoretical orientation and design

This study is informed by Pragmatist philosophy, which emphasises the need for research to understand experiences within the real world, and so produce knowledge which is both practical and useful in guiding action (Giacobbi et al., 2005; Weaver, 2018). Such a stance affords researchers the flexibility around the methods they employ so that they can best provide answers to practical problems relevant to the real world (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In the context of the current study, this allowed us to use qualitative methods to ask people about their experiences with Spotlight to develop a better understanding of how they perceive these experiences to have been beneficial in their pursuit of performance and development. This allowed us to combine the experiences of those who have engaged with

Spotlight into a coherent framework which could explain the psychological mechanisms through which Spotlight acts to aid both performance and development, and so help SPCs make more informed decisions about how they use Spotlight as an applied intervention.

Participants & sampling

Five registered SPCs (Health and Care Professions Council, UK), who were also accredited users of Spotlight, were contacted and asked if they would be willing to invite clients who had engaged with Spotlight as part of a performance-based individual- or team intervention to take part in this research. Due to the focus on perceived benefits, they were asked to consider individuals who they believed would provide a rich account of the benefits they had experienced from engaging with Spotlight, whilst also considering the various performance domains they had used the tool to enhance breadth of participants (e.g. education, sport, business). Any interested participants were asked to contact the lead researcher directly via email or phone, and additional information about the study and ethics were provided. 18 individuals subsequently made contact with the research team, of which 16 agreed to participate (6 female, 10 male). All participants were over the age of 18 and had worked in their performance context for a minimum of 7 years ($M=19.5 \pm 7.9$ years' experience). This final sample included 4 international / Olympic athletes (2 individual athletes; 2 team-based athletes), 3 headteachers, 4 senior finance executives, 3 healthcare specialists, a Michelin star head chef, and a senior business leader. We obtained institutional ethical approval prior to study commencement.

Procedure

In line with ethical principles of the institution, participants received detailed information on research processes and data confidentiality after being introduced

to the lead researcher, who invited them to take part in an interview to understand their experiences of engaging with Spotlight. These interviews took place via Zoom-teleconference ($N=15$) or telephone ($N=1$), lasting between 41 and 119 minutes ($M = 70$ mins).

We employed a semi-structured interview guide to ensure each interview remained focused on our over-arching question, while allowing some flexibility to probe participant experience (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). We developed the interview guide prior to data collection, based on pre-existing knowledge, and piloted this guide with an external researcher, who offered feedback and advice on the interview process to the lead author, who then refined and clarified some questions with the aim of improving participant experience and increasing question relevance.

All participants were interviewed by the same member of our research team, who had prior experience in conducting research interviews and possessed knowledge of Spotlight so that they could probe responses in an informed way. Having gained informed consent, the interviews always opened with an introductory question about the participants' experiences of using Spotlight (e.g. '*Tell me about your experience with Spotlight Profile.*'). This was followed by further questioning to explore the experiences described (e.g. '*Tell me about the impact you think Spotlight Profile has had on you.*'). Relevant follow-up questions and reflections from the interviewer encouraged richer description and further reflection around participants responses, before the interview concluded by inviting any further comments. The lead interviewer made notes following each interview, reflecting on whether modifications could be made to the interview guide to enhance the relevance of data to the research question being explored. This led to some modifications, such as the addition of a question asking about the participant's Spotlight preferences because of the interviewers belief that some experiences seemed to be shaped

by personality preference – with different changes to behaviour outlined depending on an individual's natural personality preferences.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis (356 pages of data) and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018)². *Familiarisation of the data* involved transcription of each interview by the lead author, who read each transcript several times to immerse themselves in the data. *Coding* then took place using NVivo (QSR International, version 12) without the aid of a codebook. This was done by the lead author based on semantic meaning, so to ensure codes represented the explicit content of the interviews.

Once all data had been coded, the lead author then looked for possible connections between each of the codes to *generate initial themes*. At first, a level of semantic similarity was sought between the codes to organise the data around lower-order themes which represented the content of what was said (e.g. the codes 'better understanding of mindset' and 'helped me realise what's important to me' were grouped together into the lower order-theme 'deeper self-knowledge'). As this process continued, a more latent approach was pursued, so to organise the different lower-order themes around underpinning psychological concepts (e.g. lower order themes of 'deeper self-knowledge' and 'accurate self-assessment' grouped together around the higher order theme of 'self-awareness'). While this stage took a more inductive approach at the start, the lead author's knowledge of psychological constructs important for performance helped to identify possible central concepts around

which codes could be grouped for our higher order themes.

In *reviewing themes*, the wider research team were engaged to discuss how themes may be refined to ensure they accurately described the interview data. This resulted in us refining existing themes and developing new ones where appropriate. The lead author then underwent a further round of coding, looking at how codes which did not fit the new thematic structure may be incorporated into the working analysis, so to capture the dataset in full. This final analysis was then reviewed by the wider research team to check for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2002). The entire research team agreed upon the final themes to be presented, before *defining and naming each theme*. *Writing up* then took place to present how individual's experiences of Spotlight were perceived to benefit their pursuit of performance and development.

Research rigor

Due to our Pragmatist approach, we emphasised the practical applications of knowledge generation within this research. To do this, we prioritised the need for practical utility within our work, as put forward in various approaches to rigour (e.g. Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021; Tracy, 2010). We focused on providing an account of the data that would be most useful to SPCs in making decisions about if and when Spotlight may be an appropriate intervention in their practice. This was done by presenting the results in a way that would highlight the common benefits between participants so that accurate predictions about the reality of applied practice could be made. Further, we also wanted our research to accurately represent the experiences of those involved within

² Whilst Braun and Clarke have revised their initial approach to Thematic Analysis to clarify the need for cognisant decision-making throughout the analysis process, they still advocate using their six-step process as a rough process for analysing data. We therefore used these six phases in a recursive, flexible and reflexive manner. For example, we moving back and forth between the phases of 'Coding', 'Generating Initial Themes', and 'Reviewing Themes' during the analysis until all authors believed the themes to summarise the whole data set.

Figure 1:
From left to right, raw data themes, lower-order themes, and higher-order themes.

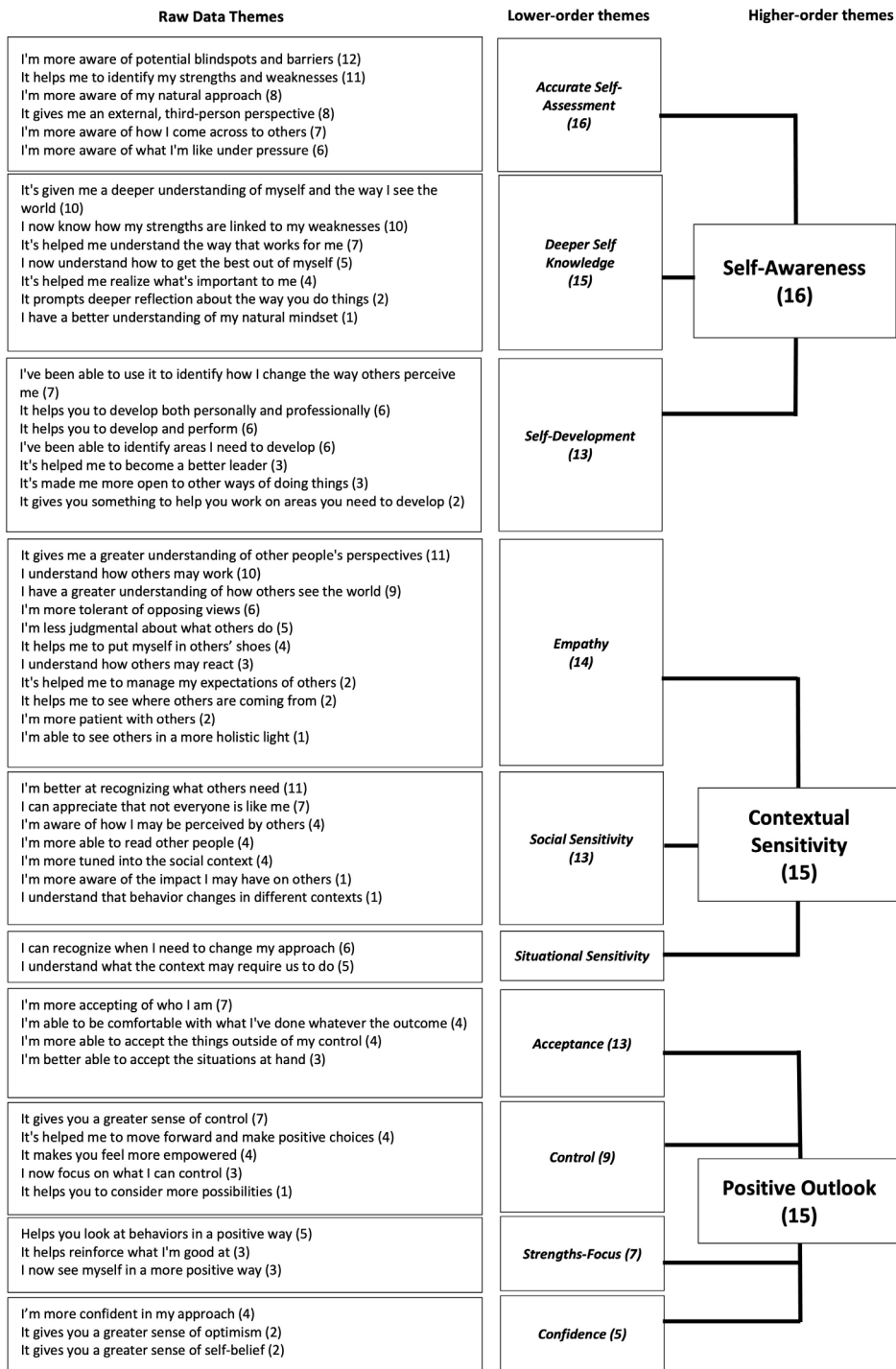


Figure 1 (continued):

From left to right, raw data themes, lower-order themes, and higher-order themes.

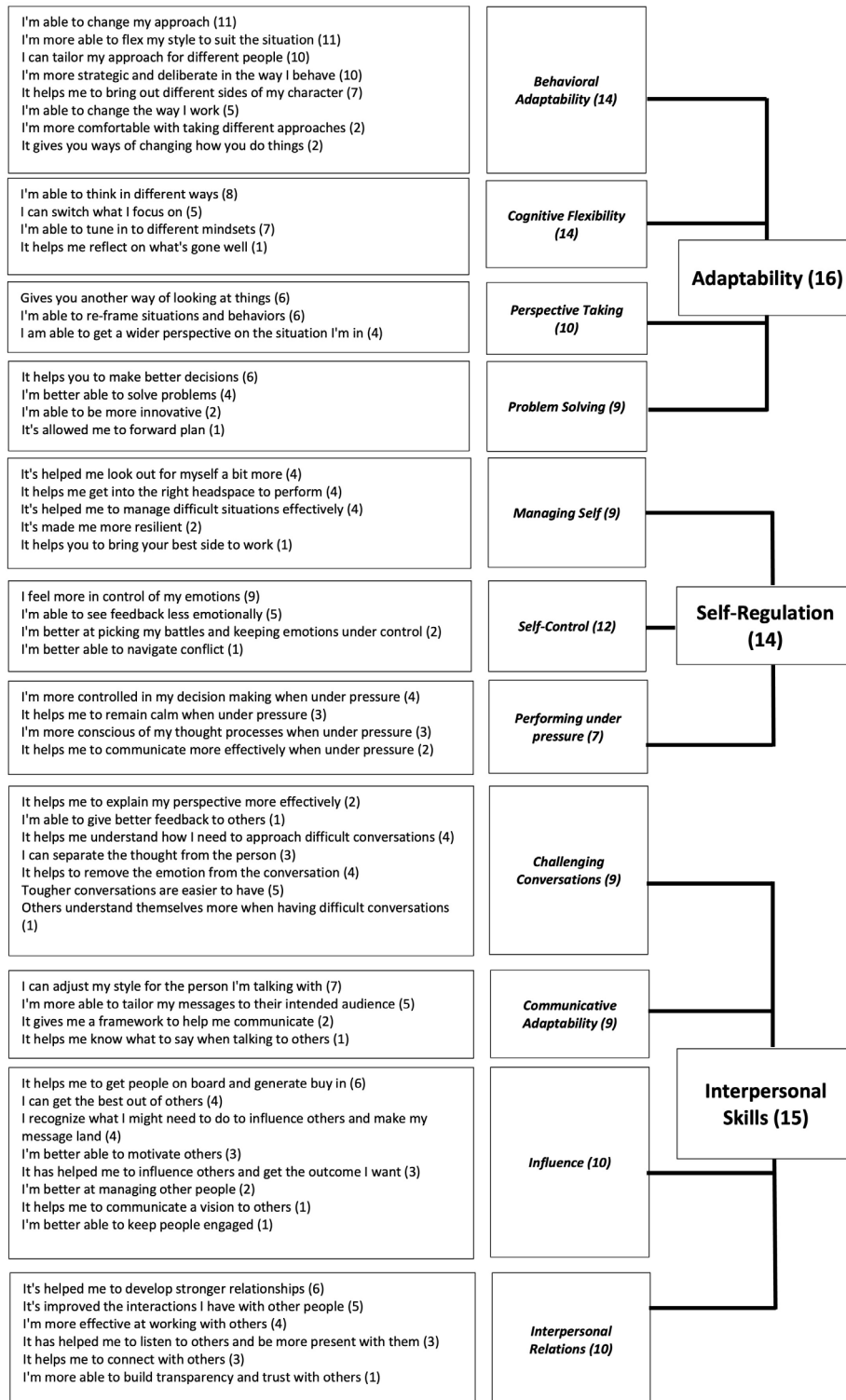
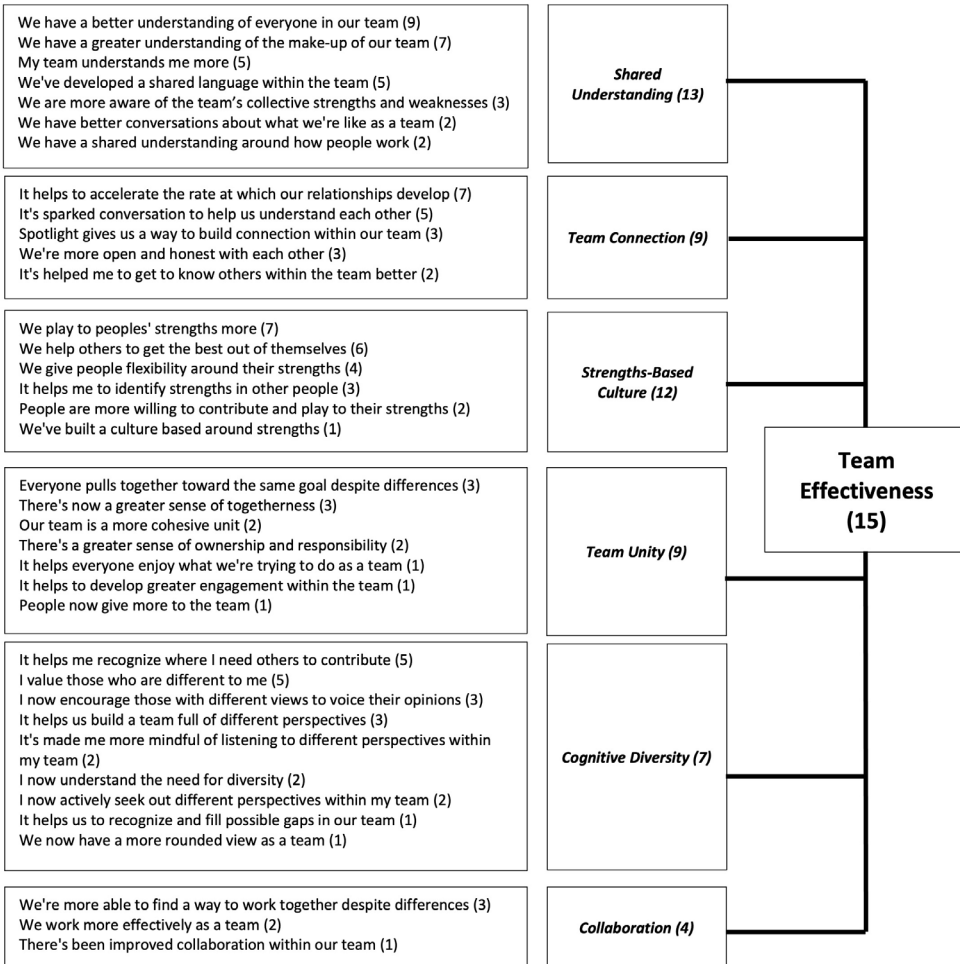


Figure 1 (continued):

From left to right, raw data themes, lower-order themes, and higher-order themes.



the research in a transparent way. For this reason, we employed transcription checking and engaged multiple researchers to ensure the final analysis accurately depicted the accounts of those interviewed. Field notes and a reflexive diary were also kept to outline how decisions about the research process were made and critical friends were engaged regularly throughout the research to challenge any assumptions being made by the lead researcher (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and ensure richness of data was preserved within the final analysis (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021).

Results

To understand how those who have engaged with Spotlight perceived their experiences to benefit their development and performance, we organised data around seven higher-order themes, comprising 27 lower-order themes (see Figure 1). In line with a Pragmatist approach, these themes were presented in a way that allows for the most accurate predictions of how engaging Spotlight may benefit end-users. These seven themes are described in greater detail, with raw data quotes presented to add richness to the data and provide a greater level of transparency (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021). Furthermore, while we acknowledge that the prevalence of a theme does not necessarily equate to importance, we have reported the number of participants whose experiences relate to each theme, so to help the reader understand the consistency of the benefits outlined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Self-awareness

The first benefit spoken about by all participants related to improved self-awareness, which involved understanding strengths and weaknesses, how they might be perceived by others, areas for personal development, and why they behave in the way they do. We organised these experiences around three lower-order themes, which described the different types of awareness gained: *accu-*

rate self-assessment, deeper self-knowledge, and self-development.

One participant described their experiences with Spotlight to give them and their support team a ‘third person point of view which we hadn’t really been aware of before’ – an experience we organised around the sub-theme of accurate self-assessment, the aspect of self-awareness that pertained to identifying one’s own strengths and weaknesses. They later explained that this helped them to understand differences between how they may be perceived by others versus their own perception of self. We also saw experiences which could be organised around the sub-theme of deeper self-knowledge, whereby engaging with Spotlight helped people to understand the reasons behind some of their behaviours, as illustrated in the quote below with respect to leadership style:

I think I would shy away from difficult conversations. If I saw something that needed to change, eventually I would certainly say something, but I would be very nervous about it. I’d have that feeling in the pit of my stomach. And I kind of recognise now that that’s just because I don’t want to upset people. I don’t want to get it wrong. And I can approach that conversation knowing I need to step into a more Forceful style. And I can do in in a compassionate and empathic way. (P3)

We also found participants often discussed how using Spotlight helped them to identify meaningful developmental goals to help them succeed in their respective domain, with one participant explaining this in the following way when asked about their overall experience of using Spotlight in their sport,

The most useful thing I’ve found about Spotlight is probably identifying your blindspots. So, knowing what you might not have covered as much, and what you might need to improve a little bit. ... [For me] that was the human side of stuff. It’s something I’ve had to work on a little bit in terms of making sure

I'm not leaving people behind, or making sure I'm thinking through the emotional side off stuff. (P16)

Contextual sensitivity

We also grouped several experiences around the idea that engaging with Spotlight helped people to notice and use cues within their environment to orient their responses to specific situational and social contexts – something experienced by 15 of the 16 participants. We grouped these experiences around three lower-order themes of *empathy*, *social sensitivity*, and *situational sensitivity*.

Participants often reported being more understanding of others' behaviours and worldviews – which we perceived to represent higher levels of empathy. In particular, one individual articulated how their experiences with Spotlight helped them to see 'other people's view of the world'. We found this to be further highlighted by the experiences of participant 2, who reported Spotlight to improve understanding between him and his coach,

We were both starting from a logical point of view, and then when I'm going 'We'll find a solution. We can do this.' He's like, 'Be careful. Watch what you're doing.' ... And for me, I was processing it as, 'Why does this guy not believe in me? Why is he so worried about me not doing it?' And then we spoke about the Spotlight stuff, and it was like 'That's his mindset. He's more worried about the risk.' ... Whereas I'm probably looking at the best-case scenario and that's what it is. (P2)

We also found a number of participants talked about how engaging with Spotlight allowed individuals to better read and understand the needs of others in a given social context, which we organised around the sub-theme of *social sensitivity*. Indeed, participant 9, a senior leader for a leading financial services provider, described how their understanding of Spotlight and its frameworks helped them to 'see the needs

of others far clearer', allowing them to be more tuned into the stressors and motivators of others through their behaviour and body language. Spotlight also appeared to help individuals appraise and respond to changing task demands – with one head teacher describing how their new insight, alongside their understanding of mindset, helped them in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic,

I mean the [Covid-19] guidance has changed so many different times in terms of what schools should do or what schools should provide or whatever else. So there had to be an element of level headedness. It wasn't a time to be panicking and to be flailing your arms about and saying, 'Oh, we need to change this, or we need to do this.' I've been very conscious of that. (P4)

Positive outlook

We also organised the experiences of 15 participants around the theme of *Positive Outlook*, as they described developing a more positive and empowering attitude through which to see themselves, others, and the world. We grouped these experiences into the four lower-order themes of *Control*, *Acceptance*, *Strengths-Focus*, and *Confidence*.

Some individuals described how the self-awareness brought about by Spotlight helped them to enhance a sense of control over different situations. Participant 5, a healthcare practitioner, captures this experience particularly well, saying, 'I'm probably more aware of how I come across to people, and then I have a little bit more control about whether I want to tweak that or not'. Alongside this, we also perceived some individuals to experience higher levels of acceptance, describing how they are now more willing to embrace all facets of their personal experience without judgement. This encompassed both positive and negative aspects of outcomes and own personal strengths and limitations, and is highlighted by the account of a headteacher, who responded to

a question about how Spotlight had helped them by saying,

I think it probably made me mindful to know that when I look at my spread of who I am [using] Spotlight, you are allowed to say you can't do it. You are allowed to ask for help. And there was never a bigger situation than being given two days to teach up 80 members of staff and 700 kids to do lockdown. ... In the past, I would have dealt with that in a hysterical, maniac way. And it isn't until speaking to you that makes me think Spotlight probably has a lot to do with how I responded. You know, what will be, will be. I will do my best. And it will always be my best, because that's in my nature. However, it's not a worry anymore that my best isn't good enough. It's my best. So, it's always going to be good enough. (P13)

We also interpreted a number of experiences to build more of a *Strengths-Focus*, with one participant commenting on how Spotlight 'helped me understand my strengths, and I suppose reinforced the sense of belief in myself'. They went on to say how engaging with Spotlight 'made me think about aspects of myself in a more positive way'. Five individuals also described accounts which we organised around the sub-theme of confidence. We found this to be particularly well captured by participant 12 who, when asked about the impact they believed their work with Spotlight had on them, said: 'Well, the first impact was confidence. It helped me confidently look at the future and realise that in some way I can be in control and steer it and mitigate and prepare for different eventualities'.

Adaptability

We also found all participants described how engaging with Spotlight allowed them to change their way of thinking or behaving so that they could be more effective in achieving a particular outcome across different situations – experiences which could be organised around the theme of *adaptability*. Specifically,

we grouped these experiences around the lower-order themes of *behavioural adaptability*, *cognitive flexibility*, *perspective taking*, and *problem solving*.

We perceived many experiences relate to improvements in *behavioural adaptability*, with participants describing occasions where they changed their behaviours to achieve a goal. This was often referred to as 'flexing', with one individual noting how engaging with Spotlight 'enabled me to sort of flex my style a bit more'. We found these experiences allowed people to approach or perform tasks in ways that were less natural to them to achieve a goal more effectively. For example, one individual who led with a more eXpressive style described becoming 'more comfortable with structure', while someone else who led with a more Contained mindset stated how Spotlight had helped them to 'be more instinctive'. In addition, we also grouped some similar experiences around the sub-theme of *cognitive flexibility*, with the difference being that these accounts described being able to think in different ways, alter the focus of their attention, and become more able to access the four different mindsets as a result of using Spotlight:

The biggest part of Spotlight was the flexible mindsets, and really engaging with that. ... Spotlight has helped, you know, get to grips with understanding how I might deal with any of the possible scenarios that the different mindsets might throw up. ... I'm aware when there are threats, how real and actual are they? And perhaps try and focus a little bit more on what I'm hoping to get out. You know, the opportunities. (P12)

We also found certain individuals to describe experiences around *perspective taking*, with one individual describing how their experience with Spotlight benefitted them by giving them a framework through which they could ask questions and so take different perspectives, saying, 'I'll try and see things from a different place on that axis. Step into different places. You know, what would a blue think? What

would a red think? What would a green think?'. As a result of understanding how to view situations from different perspectives, we also grouped five individuals' experiences around the sub-theme *problem-solving* as they described a greater ability to move between frames on a problem by using the Spotlight frameworks, enabling them to problem-solve more effectively.

Self-regulation

Individuals also seemed to describe how their experiences with Spotlight helped them improve their self-regulation skills, both in terms of getting the best out of themselves and managing their emotions. We grouped 14 participants experiences around this construct, with three lower-order themes of *managing self*, *self-control*, and *performing under pressure*.

Regarding *managing self*, one athlete stated,

'Spotlight's definitely helped me to know myself a little bit more, and what I need to be in that right sort of head space or frame of mind to go and perform' (P16).

Furthermore, participant 8, a healthcare practitioner, also spoke of being 'slightly better at looking after myself' as a result of the conversation they had around Spotlight with an accredited practitioner, as this lower-order theme was described in respect of both performance and wellbeing. We also found different examples of self-regulation, with 12 of the 16 participants describing an experience in which interacting with Spotlight helped them to manage their emotions more effectively (*self-control*), as illustrated in the following quote from a senior business leader when asked about the situations in which the awareness gained from Spotlight helped them,

I suppose it will just be the ones where I'm just trying to take the emotion out of it. My biggest weakness is my emotional switch, you know. [I] get very emotional very, very quickly and I let my emotions drive my behaviour. And trying to

actively recognise this and take the emotions out of it on numerous occasions. (P1)

Further, we grouped a number of perceived benefits around *performing under pressure*, a sub-theme which we formed to capture how many individuals described a greater ability to maintain high levels of performance even when in high pressure or stressful situations. This was experienced in a variety of different ways, with one headteacher stating, *'I've recognised now that I would naturally fall back to my natural preference in those more pressured situations. I now recognise that I'm able to push out of that bit more.'* (P4). Whilst participant 16, an international athlete, stated 'It gives me a bit of a guide about how I'd speak to someone on the pitch. Obviously that's when it's biggest pressure.'

Interpersonal skills

As a result of 15 participants describing experiences related to interacting with others, we developed this theme to capture benefits around building relationships with and influencing others. We grouped these around four lower-order themes – *challenging conversations*, *communicative adaptability*, *influence*, and *interpersonal relationships*.

The lower-order theme of *challenging conversations* captured experiences that we perceived to be connected by an increased ability to approach and engage effectively in conversations they would have previously had trouble initiating. For instance,

I really have always struggled to have difficult conversations, and Spotlight almost gives you an easier tool, and an easier in to have the conversations. You can almost frame it using Spotlight. ... I think that's where Spotlight's helped me. Just to understand myself. Understand how I put myself in a place where I need to have a harder conversation with someone. (P15)

Participants also spoke about experiences linked by *communicative adaptability* – whereby

we interpreted participants to describe benefits around becoming more adept at tailoring their communication style for different people. Indeed, participant 16 commented how their experiences with Spotlight helped give them a guide to better communicate with others, commenting: 'If I'm ever worried about what to say, I try and think, what would they want me to say? What do they need from me here? How can I help them?'. We also found such experiences could also be linked to the lower-order theme of *influence*, as we perceived individuals to describe themselves to be better at getting the best out of others and convincing them of their viewpoint. This was highlighted by the following quote from a senior leader in the financial industry,

I've got new members of the Executive Committee who I have to get on side. And I've managed to negotiate, get my own way, in a number of areas where I never thought for one minute I would be able to do it by utilizing the fact that I know they're forceful. I know they're all about the delivery. So I've got to tune in. The rationale for change is linked to something that motivates them. (P11)

Finally, we found some benefits in this area around improved *interpersonal relations*, which captured accounts connected by an improved ability to connect with others and build stronger relationships as a result of the insight they gained from engaging with Spotlight. Often these were underpinned by an increased understanding of others – as stated here,

So the colleague I was having some difficulties with I'd worked with for many years and we were very, very different people. ... So I was talking to my coach about this, and he suggested I did a Spotlight Profile. So I did the Spotlight Profile and then talked about the situation I was in, but in relation to Spotlight and what my profile had indicated about me. ... Obviously, we hadn't done the profile on this other person, but from what I said, he

could surmise where he might be on the profile. And it was quite remarkable because this individual was getting married and invited everybody in the office to his wedding, except me. ... And I tweaked the way I spoke to this person and within two weeks I got an invite to the wedding. ... It was amazing! (P5)

Team effectiveness

Finally, we could group some experiences around increased team effectiveness, with 15 of the 16 participants speaking about the influence using Spotlight had on the team in which they worked. We grouped such responses under the six lower-order themes of *shared understanding*, *team connection*, *strengths-based culture*, *team unity*, *cognitive diversity*, and *collaboration*.

The most referenced benefit that we noticed was the development of a common language in teams that could be used to better understand and describe each other (*shared understanding*). At times, this led to some interesting discoveries around team characteristics and dynamics, such as those outlined by P16,

We had some really interesting group dynamics from it, as well. Cos [sic], we sort of looked at all the players' different profiles. And there's quite a big gap in our group. ... And that probably linked in quite a lot with some of our weakness[es], sometimes, on the pitch. Like, when we're in new situations, something a bit unexpected is thrown at us, we don't always adapt super quick and take it in our stride ... So just being aware of that moving forward was quite useful for us.

Furthermore, several participants commented on the way using Spotlight accelerated *team connection*, with a senior leader in the finance sector stating how using the tool with new starters '*fast tracks that natural process of getting to know them and how they are as a person, meaning that we are comfortable with one another much sooner*' (P9). We saw such connection to

be often facilitated by the *strengths-based culture* Spotlight helped to support. Indeed, participants seemed to speak of how using Spotlight as a team encouraged team members to identify, appreciate, and utilise each other's strengths in a more effective manner – as illustrated by the following story from a headteacher,

I think it is the proudest thing that I've ever been involved in the last couple of months, because we've played to each other's strengths ... We played to all of our strengths. ... [And] when you create that culture where it's strengths-based, that's when the exciting stuff happens. (P3)

Several participants also described how using Spotlight at a team level benefitted the team by increasing *team unity*, with one athlete commenting on how the knowledge of Spotlight helps to create 'good cohesion in your team, and make sure that you're still pulling toward the same goal, even though you're thinking differently' (P15). Enhanced cognitive diversity supported this, as P3 described how Spotlight encouraged them to look for people with different perspectives to give them a more rounded view. Improved *collaboration* was also reported by four individuals, with Spotlight helping people to understand how they might be able to approach shared tasks effectively by leveraging on strengths and providing flexibility to others around how they work.

Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to explore how individuals who have engaged with Spotlight, a personality profiling tool that has been developed and utilised by SPCs working within elite sport in the UK, perceive their experiences to have been beneficial in their pursuit of performance and development. All participants described several perceived performance and development benefits gained from engaging with Spotlight, which could be grouped

into seven core themes: self-awareness, contextual sensitivity, positive outlook, adaptability, self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and team effectiveness. These themes reflect the likely performance benefits end users may experience from engaging with Spotlight, and can help SPCs make more informed decisions around when and how they may use Spotlight in their practice, based on the perspectives of those engaging with the tool.

Research highlights

As highlighted by practitioner accounts of other personality profiling tools, self-awareness is a common benefit associated with other personality profiling tools used in sport (e.g. Cotterill, 2012; Shambrook, 2009). Therefore, the development of self-awareness as a theme in this study is in line with accounts of alternative personality profile tools within sport. Indicative of the multi-faceted nature of self-awareness, the accounts seemed to illustrate that engaging with Spotlight gave individuals an accurate self-assessment, deeper self-knowledge, and helped to identify areas for self-development. Such lower-order themes are in line with aspects of self-awareness that have been identified by previous researchers, with accurate self-assessment (e.g. Goleman, 2001), self-knowledge (e.g. Morin, 2011), and self-development (e.g. Hays et al., 2002), all seen to impact individuals' ability to interact with others and perform to their potential. Such findings illustrate that end-users perceive Spotlight to help them develop self-awareness, allowing them to understand and express the skills and traits they possess and identify areas for development. This is similar to accounts which detail using Spotlight from a practitioners' perspective (i.e. Crampton, 2021),

In addition, whilst practitioner accounts of other personality profiling tools reflect how they have been used to also build emotional regulation (e.g. performing under pressure), and an understanding of others to

improve relationships and team dynamics (i.e. Cecil, 2014; Shambrook, 2009), our interpretation of the different accounts in this study suggest that engaging with Spotlight may lead to other personal development beyond these areas. In particular, the experiences described seemingly show that using Spotlight helped performers use the self-awareness and frameworks provided by their engagement with Spotlight to develop their adaptability in a self-initiated manner, allowing them to think and behave in different ways. This perhaps comes as no surprise given Spotlight's philosophical emphasis on adaptability, which differs from other tools. This marks a positive step forward given that the ability to be adaptable has been linked with several outcomes, including improvements in relationships (Clack et al., 2004), leadership (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), mental wellbeing (Ginevra et al., 2018), and sporting performance (e.g. Holland et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Spotlight's emphasis on performance and development also appeared to help end-users develop other skills and characteristics, including contextual sensitivity, a more positive outlook, and interpersonal skills, all of which have been linked to a number of positive outcomes. Indeed, the different elements of contextual sensitivity described in this study have been linked to performance-related improvements – with empathy linked to improved relationships (e.g. Jani et al., 2012) and lower levels of burnout (Brazeau et al., 2010), while both situational and social sensitivity have been shown to enhance performance in interpersonal situations (Jansen et al., 2011; Melchers et al., 2012). Interpersonal skills have also been outlined as important to positively navigating athlete transitions (Wylleman et al., 2004), while a more positive outlook has been shown to help protect individuals against the negative effects of acute stressors (Aschbacher et al., 2012; Bond & Bunce, 2003). These perceptions are similar to those outlined by practitioner

accounts of Spotlight (i.e. Crampton, 2021), adding weight to the premise that engaging with Spotlight may result in performance, relational, and wellbeing benefits.

In addition to development on an individual-level, the team effectiveness theme represents experiences whereby end-users perceived possible team-level benefits as a result of engaging with Spotlight. As is present in literature around the use of other personality profiling tools, this is likely due to the fact that personality profiling is often used by practitioners to build understanding at an interpersonal or group level (e.g. Shambrook, 2009) – with Spotlight appearing to be no exception. However, the findings here suggest that when used at a team level, outcomes may move beyond just an improved understanding of others, helping to improve team unity, build collaboration, enhance cognitive diversity, and build a strengths-based culture depending on the way in which the tool is used by SPCs. Thus, the use of Spotlight at a level beyond that of the individual may help teams develop a shared mental model – i.e. collective guidelines which enable team members to coordinate their actions in accordance with other members and task demands – which may help to build team effectiveness (Giske et al., 2014). This suggests that Spotlight may be used by practitioners to help develop performance at a team level, although it may be that such impact may be dependent on how well individual practitioners are able to embed the language and frameworks within a particular setting – as has been highlighted by other psychological interventions within sport (e.g. Ludlam et al., 2016).

Applied implications

Given the increasing use of Spotlight by SPCs, these findings offer the first insight into how the tool may be used to enhance performance and development within sport and other performance settings, and its specific mechanisms for change. Previously, navigating the efficacy of personality

profiling tools has proven to be challenging due to the lack of clear scientific basis for their impact on development. Aligned with the drive toward evidence-based practice in applied sport psychology, this has generated questions from some as to the appropriateness of such interventions – pertaining to issues around tool development and tool application (Collins & Cruickshank, 2017). With this in mind, these findings suggest that end-users perceive engaging with appropriately designed tools, such as Spotlight, can benefit their performance by building several of the psychological characteristics needed to effectively deal with the demands of their environment. Specifically, engaging with Spotlight may do this by building self-awareness, contextual sensitivity, and adaptability. This insight offers an initial framework around the areas of development that can be targeted through interventions which may use Spotlight, helping SPCs make more informed decisions around the tools' appropriateness for specific clients, contexts, and interventions.

Limitations and future research

While such findings offer a novel framework around the characteristics Spotlight may be used to develop, it must also be recognised that these findings originate from the data of sixteen, albeit detailed, accounts of individuals who have engaged with Spotlight via a small sample of five accredited practitioners. Furthermore, given the tool is experienced via a debrief, and often informs part of a wider intervention delivered by a SPC, it is unlikely that the experiences described in this study were solely down to the tool itself. Instead, the experiences described may be a result of the conversation had between performer and practitioner to make sense of the content of the report and connect it to the performers context. Thus, future research will need to consider how the tool may be used effectively by other SPCs, particularly given that some participants mentioned they may have gained more from their experiences of the tool had

it been more accessible and embedded on a daily basis. This will be an important consideration given that this study only looks at the perceived benefits of engaging with Spotlight, failing to capture the negative perceptions of personality profiling which may exist. We acknowledge that this is a limitation of this research, and so further work is needed to help SPCs understand the potential limitations of using Spotlight, with specific thought around how engagement, adherence, and follow up may influence individual experience with such tools.

Finally, previous research points to the possibility that the themes identified in this study are inherently connected with one another. For example, contextual sensitivity has been shown to be predictive of self-regulation (Bonanno & Burton, 2013), while self-awareness, contextual sensitivity, self-regulation, and elements of positive outlook may also be precursors to adaptability (e.g. Bartone et al., 2019). Although no associations among themes were examined in this study, the accounts of many participants seemed to suggest that there might be possible links among the key themes presented. From a mechanism standpoint, self-awareness, perhaps in combination with other themes identified (e.g. contextual sensitivity), could be a precursor from which one can then more effectively adapt their approach to achieve performance under a particular context. Likewise, becoming more adaptable may help people interact more effectively and meaningfully with others across different social paradigms. These findings may infer that the perceived benefits of engaging with Spotlight are intrinsically linked, with the development of characteristics, such as adaptability, building on the improvement of others, such as self-awareness. Thus, future research which focuses on the possible conceptual relationships among the themes developed in this study and further explores the possible mechanisms through which Spotlight may help to develop performance could help SPCs to structure future Spotlight-based interventions in a more productive way.

Conclusion

In summary, this study explored how individuals who have engaged with Spotlight perceive their experiences to have been beneficial in their pursuit of performance and development. In particular, engaging in Spotlight was perceived to develop performance via seven key themes, which we hope will offer an initial framework to guide potential areas of development when using Spotlight within applied practice. However, further research is warranted to fully understand how personality profiling may be best implemented to achieve optimum impact and the possible limitation of using such tools may present.

Data access statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to their containing informa-

tion that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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