Early transitions in Applied Sport Psychology Practice – Reflections of established practitioners in Denmark

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on the early transitions from student to novice professional practitioner in applied sport psychology. The purpose of this study was: (1) to determine what motivated the Danish sport psychology practitioners to pursue a career in applied sport psychology, and (2) to examine demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and outcomes within the two transitional phases of the careers. There were 6 participants in this study, 4 males and 2 females. 5 were considered established with between 8-10 years of experience and 1 a novice consultant with 2 years’ experience. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data in the study. Two theoretical models were used in analyzing the raw data. 282 raw data units were extracted from the interviews and categorized into either demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies or outcomes within each developmental phase and then arranged into category profiles representing each of the two chosen developmental phases in the theoretical model. The results are discussed in relation to previous research and theoretical frameworks as well as used to provide guidance to the new generation of aspiring practitioners.

Keywords: applied sport psychology, early career transition, career developmental phases, reflections, practitioners, Denmark.
Sammanfattning

Denna, kvalitativa studie fokuserar på de tidiga övergångarna från studerande till ny kommande professionell praktiserande inom applicerad sportpsykologi. Syftet med denna studien var: (1) att undersöka vad som motiverade de danska idrottssykelogiska rådgivarna mot att göra karriär inom applicerad sportpsykologi, och (2) att undersöka krav, resurser, barriärer, coping strategier och utfall inom de två utvalda övergångsfaserna i arbetsmodellen. Det fanns 6 deltagare i denna studien, 4 manliga och 2 kvinnliga. 5 värderades som etablerade rådgivare med mellan 8–10 års erfarenhet och 1 värderades som novis med 2 års erfarenhet. En semi-strukturerad intervjuguide användes för att samla in data i studien. Två teoretiska ramverk användes för att analysera den insamlade data. 282 rådata data utdrogs ur intervjuerna som i efterhand kategoriserades som antingen krav, resurser, barriärer, coping strategier eller utfall inom varje övergångsfas. Sedan arrangerades dessa i representerande kategoriprofiler för de två valda utvecklingsfaserna i från teoretiska modellen. Resultaten diskuteras i relation till tidigare forskning och teoretiska ramverk. Dessutom försöks det genom diskussionen att ge stöd och information till den nästa generationen av idrottssykelogiska rådgivarna.

Nyckelord: applied sport psychology, early career transition, career developmental phases, reflections, practitioners, Denmark.
Over the past decades, the field of applied sport psychology has seen rapid development in Europe (Wylleman, Harwood, Elbe, Reints, & de Caluwe, 2009). One reason for this development is the continuing effort to evolve and upgrade the standards within the field by organizations like the International Society of Sport Psychology. In the world of competitive sports, the developmental changes in the applied field of sport psychology have been seen and more and more athletes from big sporting nations like The US and Canada are now working with a sport psychology practitioner or –consultant (both titles will be used interchangeably throughout this paper when referring to the professionals in the field of applied sport psychology) in the effort of optimizing performance (e.g. Martin, Kellmann, Lavallee & Page, 2002; Martin, Lavallee & Kellmann, 2004; Todd, 2007). The Danish organization for elite sports (Team Denmark) has also over the past years witnessed a great increase in the request for trained sport psychology consultants. As a new development in Denmark the increased interest is no longer just coming from the sector of top level athletes, but also younger athletes competing at club levels are seeking help from sport psychology practitioners (Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011). This has created a problem however, because of the many different educational pathways, personal philosophies and practical approaches to how sport psychology interventions should be undertaken, there is no consensus of what qualifications are required to practice sport psychology in the applied field (i.e. Henriksen et al., 2011; Hutter, Oldenhof-Veldman, Pijpers & Oudejans, 2016; Hutter, Van der Zande & Rosier, 2016).

One problem for aspiring practitioners in Denmark is, however, that as opposed to countries like the U.S., Australia and U.K. and Sweden, there is no established educational program in place to prepare them for the practical application with clients in the field of applied sport psychology, making it impossible to guaranty the quality of the services provided by the practitioners (Morris, Alfermann, Lintunen, & Hall, 2003; Wylleman et al., 2009) This in turn creates a problem for the athletes or clients who seek the help of a sport psychology consultant because the title of sport psychology practitioner or consultant is not protected, as is the case of doctors in the medical field or clinical psychologists, making it impossible to discern the competent practitioners from the “hacks”. The competence of the consultant is important, because athletes who have worked with inexperienced and unqualified consultants have expressed feelings of being filled with feelings of frustration and disappointment instead of a sense personal development (Orlick & Partington, 1987).

In an effort to establish and secure a higher quality of sport psychology services for the elite athletes in Denmark, Team Denmark decided in 2008 to employ a staff of permanent consultants who were to work with an external team of consultants to accommodate the increased demand for competent practitioners. Team Denmark also set out to develop a joint professional philosophy to ensure the quality and uniformity of the provided services, both by the permanent staff and by the practitioners in the external network. However, this also proved difficult because of the diversity of the practices and applications in sport psychology and the differences in educational background of the practitioners (Henriksen et al., 2011). Henriksen et al. (2011) further expressed that there was a need for a similar attempt of quality management in the new generation of consultants not connected to Team Denmark to avoid negative experiences by the athletes and thereby further facilitate the previously tarnished reputation that applied sport psychology has previously lived under.

At the University of Halmstad Stambulova, Johnson and Linnér (2014) investigated the learning experiences of novice consultants and found that supervision was an effective way to develop competencies in the applied field, a belief that is also shared by seasoned practitioners in Denmark (Henriksen et al., 2011), the UK (Todd, 2007) and the U.S. (Watson Clement, Blom, & Grindley, 2009). Watson et al. (2009) also argued that supervised practice could be a step in the right direction in making sure the novice consultants develop the needed
competences and practical skills expected by the clients. However, at the present academic supervision is not an option in Denmark and it has been suggested that there is an urgent need for data about the development of applied sport psychology practitioners across all career phases, both from novice to experienced practitioners. Data and knowledge about how and why consultants first started in the field of sport psychology could be a great help for the aspiring practitioners in the field. (Wylleman et al., 2009). Adding to this information about obstacles the established practitioners faced (Roper, Fisher & Wrisberg, 2005) and lessons they learned (Cropley, Miles, Hanton & Niven, 2007; McCarthy & Jones, 2014) could also be a great help to the next generation of Danish practitioners but across Europe as well.

**Definitions of key terms**

To better understand sport psychology practitioners in Denmark a definition of what it entails to be a sport psychology consultant will be provided. Furthermore, a definition of career and career transitions is needed to understand the journeys of the established practitioners in the applied field in Denmark.

**Applied sport psychology**

The field of applied sport psychology is a multifaceted and infinitely diverse area. Silva, Conroy and Zizzi (1999) argued that there are two interpretations of the term applied sport psychology. The first is concerning the conducting of applied research, and the other relates to the application of sport psychology tools and methods in interventions with clients. Even though the two directions are interrelated and influenced by one another, when discussing the term applied sport psychology in this paper the author is referring to the latter of these definitions.

Individuals who work in applied sport psychology are known as sport psychology practitioners or consultants and are by many viewed as persons who work with individual athletes or teams to help them develop strategies and skills such as goal setting, imagery and anxiety regulation to enhance athletic performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2011). Roper (2002) also defined applied sport psychology as a way of getting athletes to achieve higher levels of performance through the application of psychological strategies and techniques. It has, however, been stated by multiple authors that applied sport psychology must have a much more holistic perspective on the athletes than just performance enhancement such as dealing with societal, social and individual change (Stelter, 2009). Practitioners in the field of applied sport psychology should be eligible to help clients through lifestyle development (McCann, 2005), personal growth, vocational development and well-being (FEPSAC, 2008) as well as career transition (Stambulova, 2010), crisis transition (Stambulova, 2003) on top of the development of psychological skills such as goal setting, visualization etc. (Papaioannou & Hackfort, 2014).

Sport psychology has developed yet another sub-discipline in the applied field where the practitioner can act not only as consultants for the athlete but also as emotional support for the significant others and coaches. They can also serve as mediators in organizations and sport clubs (FEPSAC, 2008). Furthermore, the applied field of sport psychology has been associated with the non-athletic population in the form of business coaching (Meyers, Coleman, Whelan & Mehlenbeck, 2001).

**Career as a phenomenon**

What exactly constitutes a person’s career? This question opens a multitude of options depending on who is asking. What is “careers in life”? What is a vocational career? What is an athletic career and what is a career in applied sport psychology? To answer the first question, Hughes defined a person’s life career as the fate of a person’s life cycle through a
specific society during a specific time. This means that that the entire lifespan of a person can be considered a career and every other type of career i.e. athletic or vocational must be considered as just small parts of the life career (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014).

A person’s vocational career can be viewed as developmental sequences of occupational experiences over time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). This usually refers to a hierarchical progression within a company or organization but can also refer to acquiring new skills within the same job without promotion (steady-state career) or even a person’s movement through related of non-related professional fields (spiral career) (Louis, 1980).

Athletic career is a vast subject all in its own and has over the years been defined in many ways, e.g. as an athlete’s initiation into-, participation in-, and retirement from competitive sport (Wylleman, Theeboom & Lavallee, 2004; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Athletic career can also mean the development or improvement of an athlete from local to national to international level and for some elite athletes maybe even professional level (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014) this definition referring to the maturation and improvement of skills of the athletes.

For the duration of this paper, however, career will serve as a reference to the individual’s accumulation of role-related experiences (not just occupational or athletic) over time. When researching careers, it is therefore necessary to consider not just vocational or athletic but all aspect of the person’s life career that will influence the choices, transitions and pathways the individual take on the to become established in his or her chosen field (here applied sport psychology). From this more holistic viewpoint, the person’s careers will be seen more as the development of the individual, through career stages and transitions, whether it be growing up, finishing an education, starting a family or changing jobs (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014).

Career transition

How then do we define a career transition? The word transition suggests both change and a time-period in which this change takes place. To stay in the current mind-set where career is portrayed as a role-development, a career transition would be the period in which the individual either changes his or her role or changes the way he or she approaches the same role (Louis, 1980). A transition in career then can be viewed as significant events in a person’s athletic- (e.g. Stambulova, 2012; Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004), vocational life or counselling practice (Chudzikowski, 2012). Any change from one occupational, positional or organizational situation to another could be a career transition. This could include movement across boundaries, rites of passage (Trice & Morand, 1989) either developmental or destructive for the individual’s career, causing both interruptions and discontinuities (Schein, 1971) or termination (Ng, Eby & Feldman, 2005).

Just as athletic career is a vast subject all in its own, so is the subject of athletic career transition. Transitions in athletes’ careers relate to turning points in their development which are associated with specific demands that must be acquired or taken care of to prevail in their sport or personal lives (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). These turning points can be both normative predictive events, such as the transitioning from junior to senior level, or non-normative events, such as injury or the changing of a coach or team (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Theoretical framework

Through the studying of career transition both vocational and athletic, several different models have been generated to describe the stages/phases the individual transition through. For the purpose of this research two models were used. One to understand the developmental
phases a consultant goes through during his or her career and one to understand career transitions.

**Theory of therapist development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003)**

The study of vocational career transition and development of therapists have yielded several studies. Based on their study, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) formulated the theory that all therapist or counselors go through six phases during their development into becoming an expert in the field.

The six phases are:

1. The lay helper phase; here the untrained therapist is driven by his or her need to help others and do so based on common sense and own experiences.
2. The beginning student phase; here the aspiring therapist starts his or her academic training and education to gain the required knowledge to help people based on more than just gut feeling. This phase is often filled with self-doubt and anxiety because the students find out how challenging this new profession is.
3. The advanced student phase; this phase concerns the finalizing of the educational stage when most students are already trying their luck in the applied field of counseling and therapeutic work. Although working as professionals they are still lacking experience and are still learning to be reflective and spontaneous to be more free and genuine with clients.
4. The novice professional phase is the first year after graduation when the therapist is on his or her own for the first time with no supervision and still learning the basics in terms of consular-client relationship such as over-involvement and disappointment with slow progress. Many also experience frustration in this phase due to lack of preparation for practical work during their education. The novice therapists also start to find their own style of communication with patients and clients and the more experience the novices get the more autonomous their way of dealing with different situations becomes.
5. The experienced professional phase is when the therapist after several years of practical experience as a counselor is confident in dealing with a multitude of different scenarios and trusts his/her professional judgement. Their work now reflects the confidence they have obtained through years of practice and experience. Because of the age of most therapists during this phase many of them experience conflicting interests regarding family life vs. working career.
6. The last phase (6) is the senior professional phase. Here the therapist has become very experienced (approximately 20-25 years in the field) and is regarded as a senior by his or her peers. During this phase, many therapists see a vast change in the way others perceive them, e.g. transitioning from peer to a leader or teacher. For many this phase is also the beginning of retirement.

**The Athletic Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 2003)**

The athletic career transition model is consistent with Wylleman et al. (1999) in considering career transition, not as a single event but as a process. During this process, the athlete is forced to cope with a set of specific demands to make a successful transition to the next step in the athletic career.

The transitional demands can create conflicts for the athlete forcing him or her to mobilize resources and come up with coping strategies. How effective the chosen coping strategies are dependent on the dynamic balance between the resources and the barriers of the transition. For this model, the resources are comprised from both internal and external factors that assist the coping processes (e.g. skills, motivation and financial support) while the barriers of the transition consist of all internal as well as external factor that can disrupt the effectiveness of the coping (e.g. lack of knowledge, lack of training facilities, lack of social
Coping is in this model seen as the pivoting point defining whether the athlete can make a successful transition or not.

The first part of the model considers the factors that can affect coping with the transitional demands the athlete is faced with. The second part illustrates two outcome possibilities and consequences of the transition. The two outcomes are (1) successful transition, which is when the athlete can cope effectively or develop sufficient resources to overcome the barriers he or she is faced with during the transition; and (2) crises transition, where the athlete is unable to facilitate effective coping with the demands presented in the transition. For this reason, the model will not be used in its entirety as the focus of this study is only on the successful transitions made by the participants.

The author of this paper argues that this model is equally suited for explaining transitions faced in other aspect of a person’s life, such as vocational career transition. And the model will for that reason be used to investigate and explain the transitions made in a career in applied sport psychology.

**Previous Research in applied sport psychology**

The research topic of career transitions in applied sport psychology is scarce and consists for the most part of counselor career development studies (e.g. Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tod, 2007) and studies concerning experiences and lessons learned by sport psychology consultants (e.g. Roper, 2008; Stambulova & Johnson, 2010). Previous information about how the demands, resources, barriers and successful coping strategies used during each transitional stage is comprised from previous studies (e.g. Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tod, 2007; Roper, 2008), as well as the carrier narratives and learning experiences of
already established practitioners in the field of applied sport psychology (McCarthy & Jones, 2014).

Motivation for applied sport psychology

Previous research on what motivated consultants to start a career in applied sport psychology has shown that for many the biggest motivator was a passion for sport, competition and human performance (Simons & Andersen, 1995; Roper, 2008; McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Many consultants also state that the desire for helping others was a motivation factor (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). McCarthy & Jones (2014) also discovered that seeing the athletic world and environment of sport as a great natural laboratory and thus the chance to learn about their own interests and develop new skills was a factor for some consultants. Several consultants have also expressed that one of the reasons they got in to sport psychology was that this created an opportunity to combine an academic career while still being able to stay in competitive sport (McCarthy & Jones, 2014).

The advanced student phase

Early in the careers of sports psychology practitioners Roper (2008) discovered, that most the practitioners had gone through an “immersion” period when they had gathered as much knowledge about sport psychology as they could and found out exactly how to pursue a career in the field of applied sport psychology. This could indicate that a demand for self-education is needed as well as a thirst for new knowledge.

Stambulova and Johnson (2010) found that students who were making their first entrance into applied sport psychology considered the most demanding aspects to be; how to begin the whole intervention, -to identify working issues, -to find theories suitable for the case, -to calculate how much time each topic may take, -to deal with the client's environment, and -to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in a professional way (p. 301). In these cases, the students learned to cope with the demands by relying on their internal resources (i.e., confidence in their own ability, their knowledge of sport psychology and their skills in sport) as well as their external resources (i.e., support from teachers and peers). These findings are consistent with results from investigations on Australian trainees in applied sport psychology (Tod, Marchant, & Andersen, 2007).

Stambulova and Johnson (2010) also found that the students reported that they had struggled with internal barriers in the form of negative thoughts, lack of confidence and self-doubt which is consistent with the findings of Tod, Andersen and Marchant (2011). External pressure in the form of lack of time or client’s travels and cancelling session and even keeping the clients interested created problems for the students entering the field (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010).

For the Swedish students, some factors, such as personal experience in the client’s sport could be perceived as both a resource and a barrier, in that the previous knowledge made it easier to identify with the client’s experiences but created problems in terms of not straying outside the professional boundaries of the consultant (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010).

In order to cope with the many demands presented by the early phases of working in applied sport psychology, Swedish students adapted coping strategies, such as seeing the applied consulting work as a continuous learning process, structured preparation and planning, finding different way to understand the clients and journaling and assessments (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010).

The novice professional phase

Practitioners have stated that, because the field of sport psychology is continually evolving motivation to attaining new knowledge is a keystone for being a good and successful
consultant (McCarthy & Jones 2014). This indicates that there is a demand for continued education and willingness to keep learning through the career. Being able to reflect and be critical towards one’s own work was found to be an important skill needed in order to keep learning and evolving as a practitioner (Todd, 2007; McCarthy & Jones, 2014). A continued demand for self-reflective capabilities was also found (Hutter, Oldenhof-Veldman, Pijpers, & Oudejans, 2016). Building a foundation in the form of a social and professional network was also expressed by consultant (Simons & Andersen, 1995; McCarthy & Jones, 2014).

Barriers experienced in this phase of professional career development included feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed when faced with trying to solve client issues (Tod et al., 2010). Feelings of attachment to the theoretical frameworks and not being able to think outside the box (Tod et al., 2009) also created hardship for the novice consultants. Skepticism from athletes and coaches were found to be a barrier for both the development of their own skills but also of their professional career (McCarthy & Jones, 2014) creating feelings of frustration by novice consultants from the U.S. and the U.K. This is consistent with Roper (2005; 2008) who further found that female consultants experienced barriers in the form of lack of respect by athletes, peers and coacher because they were women. Lack of computer and financial knowledge also created barriers for some consultants, as this is now an important skill to have in self-promotion and setting up a business (McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Being financial dependent on other sources of income was however also found by male consultants even after several years of working as a professional consultant (Roper, 2008; McCarthy & Jones, 2014).

Novice consultants identifying resource in the form of experience and the increased confidence that followed working in the applied field for a few years (Tod et al., 2011; Hutter et al., 2016). Hutter et al. (2016) further found that “know how” and increased knowledge of practical tools for application were important resources available to the consultants with more experience. Watson, et al. (2009) studied the perception of mentoring as a teaching process for sport and exercise psychology graduate students and found that it was an effective way to develop confidence. Consultants also describe how their own knowledge of sport either as a player, coach or team doctor were important assets to their ability to work in applied sport psychology (McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Roper (2005) highlighted the fact that an important resource for women was female role models because of the predominantly male dominated field.

To cope with the various demands and obstacles consultants have expressed working hard, learning to be flexible and being prepared for anything as strategies (McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Others have expressed that a fundamental necessity for their successful development was having social support in the form of a mentor or peers (Tod, et al., 2007; Tod er al., 2009) Tod et al. (2011) indicated that practitioners developed patience and trust in themselves after the initial years making them more flexible and free to adapt their interventions for the benefit of their clients. This is consistent with Simons and Andersen (1995) described that a valuable lesson in the developmental phase of a career was to learn to “role with the punches” and adapt to the demands of the clients.

Motive for this study

As mentioned, there is to date no acknowledged academic program preparing aspiring practitioners in the field of applied sport psychology in Denmark (Wylleman et al., 2009). And although a mentoring process is highly viewed by the established practitioners in Team Denmark (Henriksen et al., 2011) as well as educators in Sweden (Stambulova et al., 2014), the opportunities for learning from others in this way, are very few since there are so few established practitioners in applied sport psychology in Denmark. However, learning about the careers and the experiences of others is possible. Wylleman et al. (2009) suggested that
more information on the development of practitioners in the field of applied sport psychology was needed. This because the available data is not only limited but is also represented disproportionately across the different career phases and in some instances non-existent (e.g. the student in applied sport psychology education and the experienced practitioner).

It has been suggested that a study with the focus on the transitions made by novice consultants from their educational phase to their autonomous professional practice using career development and transition theoretical frameworks from sport psychology and vocational psychology is needed with focus on other countries than Sweden (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010).

By studying the backgrounds motivations, transitions and learning experiences, of the established Danish consultants, insight into possible predispositions may be gained. This could be useful for those pursuing a career in the field as well as give insight into some of the developmental phases the established Danish practitioners have gone through.

Research into the development of consultants may accrue beneficial learning for new practitioners. Aspiring practitioners may also be better prepared through learning from others who were in their position and by being forewarned about possible obstacles that could complicate their development in the field of applied sport psychology. Neophyte consultants may also benefit from a study like this too when planning their career path and it may help them to mature faster and more efficient in the practical field (Todd, 2007).

**Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences and reflections of the established practitioner during their transition into the field of applied sport psychology and to investigate how they were able to make successful transitions from students to professional consultants. To understand why they got interested in the field in the first place and to investigate what demands and barriers they experienced during the first phase of their development as well as what resources and coping strategies they used in order to make a successful transition from student to practitioner. The aim was to do this by achieving the following objectives:

1. To determine what motivated the participants to begin a career in applied sport psychology.
2. To examine two transitional phases experienced by the participants during the beginning stages of their career development i.e. the transition from beginning student to advanced student and then further on to becoming a novice professional in the applied field sport psychology.

**Design**

In order to investigate the study aims, a qualitative approach was determined. Semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate for collecting and analyzing data. This study design was chosen because, through qualitative interviews the researcher may gain insight into the informant’s experiences and the values, decisions, motivations, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and emotions they attach to them (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The research was designed to provide a retrospective view into the transitional phases of the beginning- and the advanced student. The data was collected by interviewing each of the participants about their motivation for applied sport psychology and their experiences with starting a career in the field.

**Participant recruitment**

A list of criteria for participation in this study was created to ensure that the participants had enough experience in the field of applied sport psychology to generate adequate data. As
well as being geographically located so the researcher had a chance to interview them in person. The list of criteria included: (1) working in the applied field of sport psychology in Denmark (now or in the past); (2) No longer under education (not including Ph. D.); (3) having at least 2 years experience working as a sport psychology consultant. (4) work in Copenhagen area. To find participants for the study Team Denmark’s permanent staff as well as their external network was researched and here five participants met the criterias. They were all contacted by e-mail and informed about the purpose of the study. All contacted practitioners volunteered for the study and one provided contact information for a colleague who was also interested in participating. One additional participants were added to the study because she was formerly employed by Team Denmark but now lives in Sweden

**Participants**

The participants (see Table 1) consisted of two female- and four male sport psychology practitioners, all working or having previously worked in the applied field in Denmark. The participants had between 2 and 10+ years experience working in this field. Four of the participants completed their MS in sport science in Denmark, three of which complemented this with a European master in sport psychology in either Norway or Sweden, one got her BA in sport science in Denmark and a MS in sport psychology as well as a European master in Sweden. As earlier mentioned the criteria for working in applied sport psychology in Denmark does not have an overarching consensus, and the practical field is therefore subject to a multitude of diverse approaches. The only organization which has constructed a unified philosophy and ground rules to ensure the quality of the delivered services is Team Denmark (Henriksen et al., 2011). For this reason, it was deemed necessary to insure participation from Danish consultants employed by Team Denmark (now or in the past) either permanent staff or as an external consultant. These consultants would also provide the greatest amount of experience working in the applied field. Lastly, one novice consultant (an apprentice of one of the established) was chosen to investigate possible similarities or differences between the practitioners who started 10 years ago and now. Although this participant (#4, see table 1) was still new in the field of applied sport psychology, the researcher still considered him as an established sport psychology consultant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Academic attainment</th>
<th>Primary career</th>
<th>Years in ASP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ph.D</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Team Denmark)</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Private sector)</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Private sector)</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Private sector)</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Team Denmark)</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ph.D student</td>
<td>Sport psychology consultant (Private sector)</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) that focused on career experiences and career transitions was generated (see Appendix 1). The semi-structured interview guide was made flexible to let the informants tell their story as freely as possible, but also with prepared questions to ensure that the researcher secured the needed information (Christensen, Nielsen & Schmidt, 2007). Each interview started with a brief introduction of the researcher and the study aims, as well as an explanation of the ethical aspects of participating in this study. The participants were assured that the investigation, data collection and data storing was in accordance with the Swedish guidelines for ethical research which included that all data would be kept confidential, and that all results and data from the study would only be used for academic purposes (Vetenskabsrådet, 2011).

After the introduction, every interview continued with the interviewer inviting the participants to talk about their lives in an open-ended question such as: can you please tell me about yourself? This was followed by more specific questions such as: can you create a timeline concerning your professional career? The interviewer then asked the participants about their educational background such as: How did your education in applied sport psychology start? Hereafter, questions about practical training, mentorships and working opportunities were asked and finally the participants were asked to reflect on different transitions they had made during their career in applied sport psychology, such as: how did you get started in the applied field? And what changes have you made during your career in applied sport psychology. During the questions about career transitions the participants were asked to give account for any experienced barriers during their career that they found relevant for either making them better at what they do or forcing them to change direction in their career as well as elaborating on how they managed to deal with struggles or set back on the way.

Pilot interview

As a test run of the interview guide, and to get a chance to refine or change the questions, the author conducted a pilot interview (Christensen et al., 2007). The pilot interview was conducted with a clinical nutritionist who had established herself in the field over the last seven years. For obvious reasons this was not exact population for the study as the questions were designed for consultants in applied sport psychology, but she had gone through many of the same career transitions and experience, that is seen in the other form of therapists and consultants in the clinical field i.e. starting an education, starting her own business, learning the field of consulting clients and building a name for herself. Therefore, this person was found adequate for the pilot interview. After the 47 min interview the questions were revised, minor changes were made to the interview guide.

Procedure

As mentioned the participants were contacted with an participation invitation by email. For the participants to give their informed consent (Vetenskabsrådet, 2011) to participate in the study the invitation also contained additional information explaining their rights and conditions of their participation. For the convenience of the participants all interviews were scheduled and performed at the participants’ workplace and lasting no longer than 45-60 min. Due to geographical location of one of the participants, one interview was performed using Skype. This way of conducting interviews is not optimal due to the lack of personal contact between the interviewer and the informant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), but was in this case regarded as adequate because the researcher already had a long-standing relationship with this participant. All interviews were recorded using a digital device (iPhone) and participants were guaranteed full anonymity.
Data analysis

In order to analyze the data and create category profiles for the two transitional phases an inductive-deductive content analysis was done. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author. The transcripts were then read and re-read to get familiarity (Christensen et al., 2007). The analysis was initiated by copy-pasting paragraphs and sentences relating to the study aims into a separate document for better overview and the original transcriptions were put aside. The compressed transcripts were dissected into raw data-units in the form of single words or sentences. Category profiles for each of the two transitional phases were created using the theoretical frameworks and divided into higher-, lower- and raw data themes. The higher order themes were deductively created from the theoretical frameworks. The lower order themes were created using both a deductive approach developing the themes using the theoretical frameworks, as well as inductively from the raw data. The raw data themes, were inductively created from the raw data units based on similarity of responses in the overarching category (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Specific quotes illuminating each of the participants’ motivation for the chosen career path were extracted as well as pinpointing each of the participants’ successful transition were also extracted from the raw data.

All the interviews were undertaken in Danish the edited data transcripts were translated into English. This was done by the author with the help of an assistant (English native speaking) to secure the quality of the presented data (Christensen et al., 2007). The entire analysis process was performed by the author.

Results

The presented results first include specific examples of how and why each of the participants got interested in sport psychology in the first place and what motivated them to pursue a career in the applied field. Thereafter, category profiles for what demands, resources, barriers and coping strategies the participants experienced during the transition through the developmental phase of the beginning- and the advanced student phase are presented.

Lastly, reflections of the practitioners are presented according to when each of the participants pinpointed their own successful transitions from being a student to the first professional phase (The novice professional phase).

Motivation for applied sport psychology

When asked about how their first experiences and initial interest in the field of applied sport psychology, a commonality between the participants was that they all had been very active sports people in their younger years, and that this interest and experience greatly contributed to their own decisions to start a career in applied sport psychology.

Without knowing about the field of applied sport psychology most of the participants always felt that there was something missing in their sport that they needed to figure out. Whether it was trying to get a grip on the competitive nerves, or wanting to learn how to handle negative thoughts or learning how to push performance boundaries.

Participant #1 discovered his interest in sport psychology and in how it could be used to push his own limits:

/…/ I played football most of my life, as a youth elite, and after that I joined the military and started to get an interest for like pushing the body and pushing the psyche, so I joined the special forces (Jægerkorpset) briefly, and after that, it was again pushing myself, I started doing triathlons and did a few Ironmans and qualified for the World Championships in Ironman as well, it was always about pushing my limits…

Participant #2 a former competitive figure skater stated:

It had my own performance problems, ehh… I couldn’t perform at Nationals, but I could perform all other times… So, we figured that there was something wrong in my head
hehe... So, I went to a normal psychologist actually, because there were no sport psychologists in my town, there were some over in Copenhagen… And I remember that the psychologist gave me a book, and he told me that he didn’t know a lot about sport psychology, but I could read Willy Railo’s book “Best when it matters” … That was the first psychology book I ever had, ehm… and then I realized that it (sport psychology) could make a big difference, so I started using it on myself /…/ and then I knew this is what I want to do. Now the question is just how I get there…

Participant #3, who didn’t realize it at the time but looking back at her experiences recognized the start of her interest in sport psychology was at a very young age when she was a competitive badminton player. She stated:

/…/ I think it was pretty early that I felt stressed by others, it was pretty early (in my sporting life) that I had thoughts about what others thought about me /…/ I couldn’t handle the thoughts that occurred in the situations when I was under pressure, meaning I could be really good Wednesday at practice and then Saturday morning in the arena, I couldn’t get my game to work and that frustrated me so much and it took up so much space, in my head, that I couldn’t move past it. So I could easily lose the first set, just based on that, before I kinda got in the game and calmed down. So already at this point it was on my mind, then I got an injury when I was 15, in my knee, and had an injury period which was pretty hard, because how do I return and those things you go through…

Participant #4 stated that, even though he had been playing football his whole life he chose to study sport and health because he wasn’t sure what he wanted to do and the opportunity to work in applied sport psychology presented itself during his bachelor thesis:

I kind of thought that sport psychology in the classical sense with visualization, goal-setting and anxiety regulation was boring. I mean, it was ok but it didn’t really get me hooked. /…/ Then during my bachelor thesis my supervisor offered me, if I would like to work a few hours a week with him, primarily as a coordinator during some projects and stuff like that to get started in the field, and that sounded pretty interesting, and since I didn’t have a job I said of course I will. /…/ I think I was slowly eased into the whole consulting and conversation without realizing it /…/ and then I just got more and more interested in it!

Participant #5 stated that, in his opinion all passion for something originates in a vulnerability that you’ve felt in your own life:

For me it was in elite table tennis where I played with the junior national squad and I was always very reflective as a person, but I also felt very alone with these feelings of curiosity towards the mental aspect. I remember, I was in contact with a sport psychologist who was connected with the federation and that opened my eyes to the profession but I always had this curiosity. I was very early to ask questions like, why are things the way they are? couldn’t it be different? So then, when I was studying sports, I would always choose the subjects related to the psychological and the pedagogic fields.

Participant #6, who played elite handball for most of his life, stated that; ‘for him like so many others, it started with a curiosity and experiences in his own sport.’ He also stated:

What I found interesting was, I felt like I had some days where I was on a roll and then some days where I was really struggling and I had a curiosity towards, what the hell is going on? I come from a small town with 5000 people, so then when I transferred to a bigger team in a bigger city I experienced some other expectations and those kinds of
things and I felt like I was alone with this /…/ so I got interested in what methods can I work with to sort this out. /…/ I was also always interested in the role of the coach, what is it that makes it so that one coach can get us to work together and get the best out of us and some that just didn’t work.

Each participant had different ways of being introduced to the field of sport psychology, but for all of them it started with their own interest and passion for sport and competition. A curiosity towards the multiple factors that can be influenced by performance, teamwork and ways of coping with adversity, also created strong motivation for the majority of the participants. Several of the participants also expressed that they, through their own sporting career, constantly were affected by a general feeling that something was missing in their training regime and a thirst for understanding the reasons behind the frustrations and wanting to learn new skills to improve themselves, which also served as motivation to learn about sport psychology.

Although all the participants expressed great interest and passion for sport, not all of them had an initial interest in the field of applied sport psychology. Even so, it’s clear that the curiosity for the field was always there, so when an opportunity presented itself and the chance to learn from someone with experience in the field occurred there was no hesitation, whether this was in the form of a mentor presenting oneself or the chance to travel to a different country to study.

**Participants reflections through the transitional phases**

To investigate the aims of this study, the focus was centered around the transitions from student to the phase that was related to professional work as a consultant in the applied field, i.e. the transition from the advanced student phase to the novice professional phase.

Using the Athletic Career Transition Model, the transcribed interviews were examined for raw data units in relation to four preset higher order themes (demands, resources, barriers and coping strategies). The five higher order themes served as a way of outlining what the participants experienced as requirements or helpful predispositions for them to make a successful transition into the next phase of their career. Raw data are presented in schematic form for the two transitional phases along with exemplified quotes for the raw data theme. Lastly the points of successful transitions in to the novice professional phase as identified by each of the participants are present in quotes.
### The Beginning Student Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data themes</th>
<th>Lower order themes</th>
<th>Higher order themes</th>
<th>Category (N = 79)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive for new knowledge (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources (29)</td>
<td>Beginning phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude (7)</td>
<td>Internal (26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching experience (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being headstrong (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive parents (3)</td>
<td>External (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having an interest in sport (7)</td>
<td>Motivation (10)</td>
<td>Demands (21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fascination for relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>the physical and psychological (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willingness to travel for school (7)</td>
<td>Sacrifice (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding you own way (4)</td>
<td>External (12)</td>
<td>Barriers (16)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No education in DK (6)</td>
<td>Internal (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of consultants (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frustration (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding my own way (4)</td>
<td>Coping strategies (7)</td>
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<td>Persistence (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Found a pathway (3)</td>
<td>Outcome (6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moved abroad (3)</td>
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Figure 2 - Category profile for the beginning student phase

The student phase as a category profile revealed 79 raw data units within the 4 higher order themes.

**Demands:** This higher order theme covered 21 raw data units which uncovered 2 lower order themes. The first lower order theme *Motivation* covers 3 raw data themes:

*Having an interest in sport,* was seen as a demand by all participants, as stated: “Just like with anything, you need to be passionate about it to succeed”, “so here you need to have a passion for sports and a curiosity about it”.

*Fascination for relationship between the physical and psychological,* was seen by some to be a must if you were to keep learning, as stated: “I wanted to understand why I was buckling under pressure”, “I was fine at one competition and not the next”.

*Wanting to understand the coach,* was a necessity for some, as a motivator to start an education in the field but also seen as a necessary skill to have, as stated: “I wanted to know if that was the only way to get a message across”, “I needed to know why and how to interact with coaches”.

The second lower order theme *Sacrifice* covers 2 raw data themes:

*Willingness to travel for school,* was seen as a demand by almost all of the participants because they had to leave Denmark in order to further their education applied sport psychology, as stated: “There was nothing here, so I had to go to Sweden to get my degree and start the applied work”.

*Finding my own way,* was seen as a necessity by a few of the participants because of the lack of supervised practice, stated: “I had to do it on my own, because there
was nobody to supervise me”, “it’s a shame that the education system is like this in Denmark, but what can you do…”

**Resources.** This higher order theme covered 29 raw data units under 2 lower order themes. The first lower order theme *Internal resources* covered 5 raw data themes:

*Drive for knowledge,* was considered a useful resource as stated: “My motivation to keep learning kept me reading and studying so I got better and that helped me being more sure of my methods”.

Having a *positive attitude,* was a helpful resource for the participants as stated: “I knew I had to learn, so I stayed positive even when things did work out”, “It’s about learning and getting experience I told myself”.

*Being headstrong,* was found by one of the participants as key in the early phase of the career, she stated: “I didn’t take no for an answer, if they said it wasn’t possible I found another way covers, and I made I happen anyway”.

The second lower order theme *External* covers 1 raw data theme:

*Supportive parents,* was considered a valuable externa source of support as stated: “My dad helped me out” or “My parents came to Sweden with me”.

**Barriers:** This higher order theme covered 16 raw data units under 2 lower order themes: The first lower order theme *Internal* cover 1 raw data theme:

*Frustration,* was a barrier for some of participants in the beginning, as stated: “I was frustrating not being able to get help in the beginning, and figuring out how to go about it all was hard”.

The second lower order theme *External* cover 2 raw data themes:

*No education in DK,* this was seen as a barrier by almost all the participants, as stated: “I didn’t have the chance to learn from anyone her in Denmark like you can in Sweden”, “it would make such a difference if the was a program in Denmark”.

*Lack of consultants,* was seen as a barrier as stated: “There wasn’t a lot of practitioners in the field at the time so getting a mentor was not possible”.

**Coping strategies:** This higher order theme covered 7 raw data units. A lower order theme was not found. The raw data units were divided into 2 raw data themes:

*Finding my own way,* was a strategy used for many scenarios by the participants, as stated: “We did it on our own, we figured like this we would learn together and when we could get help anyway we used each other”.

*Persistence,* was a strategy used by some of the practitioners, as stated: “When they wouldn’t help me”, “I just kept pushing until I got my way”.
Outcomes: This higher order theme covered 6 raw data units under. There was not found a lower order theme. The raw data units were divided by 2 raw data themes: *Found a pathway*, was the result of research and persistence as stated: “I finally got my way and was able to get accepted to the classes I needed, I knew there was a way”.

*Moved abroad*, was the necessary outcome for some of the participants: “I wasn’t didn’t feel that the Danish system could provide what I needed, so I moved to Halmstad instead”.

The Advanced Student Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data themes</th>
<th>Lower order themes</th>
<th>Higher order themes</th>
<th>Category (N = 203)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certainty (10)</td>
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<td>Drive to learn (9)</td>
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<td>Confidence (8)</td>
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<td>Other income (10)</td>
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<td>Partnership (6)</td>
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<td>Mentors (7)</td>
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<td>Family (3)</td>
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<td>Working hard (13)</td>
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<td>Building a network (11)</td>
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<td>Willing to work for free (8)</td>
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<td>Willing to work in related fields (4)</td>
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<td>Self-doubt (12)</td>
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<td>Lack of experience (10)</td>
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<td>Fear (5)</td>
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<td>Finding work (7)</td>
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<td>Family (3)</td>
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<td>Worked hard (10)</td>
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<td>Asked for help (10)</td>
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<td>Found another way (7)</td>
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<td>Experience (7)</td>
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<td>Getting more established (5)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internal (27)</td>
<td>Resources (53)</td>
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<td>External (26)</td>
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<td>Hard work (36)</td>
<td>Demands (51)</td>
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<td>Academic knowledge (15)</td>
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<td>Advanced student phase</td>
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<td>Internal (27)</td>
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<td>Coping strategies (27)</td>
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<td>Outcome (25)</td>
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Figure 3 - Category profile for the advanced student phase

The development stage as a category profile revealed 203 raw data units within the 5 higher order themes.

**Resources:** This higher order theme covered 50 raw data units under two lower order themes. The first lower order theme *Internal (27)* cover 3 raw data themes:
Certainty, was a strong motivator for some of the participants, as stated: “I knew what I wanted, so I put all my energy into it then and there”.

Drive to learn, was a resource needed by all the participants, as stated: “We took every chance we could to gain more knowledge and experience”. “It was all about learning as much as possible”.

Confidence, was a helpful source at this stage, as one stated participant: “We wanted to figure it out on our own”, “I knew my strengths and we trusted ourselves enough to go for it”.

Mentorship, was considered an important resource as stated: “I’m under his wing, and now I’m getting fast-tracked with experience, it’s very comforting and feel very lucky in this”.

The second higher order theme External cover 26 raw data units under 4 raw data themes:

Other income, was seen as a resource by several of the participants, as stated: “I kept working at the University, it was nice to have a steady income, it took a lot of pressure of me that I didn’t need to make money”.

Having a Partnership, was a great resource to two of the participant as stated: “We both are where we are today because we had each other, it was and the best way of learning the I can imagine”.

Family, was a resource by some of the participants, as stated: “My family supported my decision and they helped my start my business”.

Demands: This higher order theme covered 51 raw data units under 2 lower order themes. The first lower order theme Hard Work (36) cover 4 lower order themes:

Working hard, was seen as a demand by all of the participants, as stated: “In the beginning, it’s a lot of hard work”. “You need to put in the work and you don’t want to do that, then this is not for you”.

Willing to work for free, was a necessity for several of the participants, as stated: “I worked for free at least in part in the beginning”, “it’s about getting the experience so see the free work as an investment”, “I worked for free a lot”, I worked for experience” or “we did lots of unpaid work”.

Willing to work in related field, was something that almost everyone had to do in the beginning, as stated: “I worked with young hash-addicts it wasn’t sport psychology but some of the tools were the same and I learned a lot”.

The second lower order theme Academic knowledge, cover 1 raw data theme:

Studying, was a demand that everyone agreed upon, as stated: “You still need to keep reading, especially after you finish school because now is when everything will start making sense”.
**Barriers:** This higher order theme covered 52 raw data units under 2 lower order themes. The first lower order theme *Internal* cover 3 raw data themes:

- **Self-doubt,** was found to be a barrier, as stated: “You doubt yourself a lot in the beginning and I think that’s natural”.

- **Lack of experience,** was a barrier for all the participants in the beginning as stated: “You don’t have the experience you want so you just have to try to work as much as you can, but the first few clients are always tricky”.

- **Fear,** and uncertainty was found to be barriers for some, as stated: “I didn’t find any work and that was scary because I needed to make money in order to live”.

The second lower order theme *External* cover 3 raw data themes:

- **Money,** created a barrier for several of the participants, as stated: “You don’t make any money in the beginning so you need another source of income”.

- **Finding work,** was found to be a barrier for some, as stated: “There is not a lot of work in the beginning, you have to call every contact you have whether that’d be clubs or federations where you know someone”.

- **Family,** created barriers for some of the participants early in their career, as stated: “No I had a child, so I wasn’t as flexible any longer and I didn’t want to travel as much”.

**Coping strategies:** This higher order theme covered 27 raw data units under 3 raw data themes:

- **Worked harder,** was a useful coping strategy as stated: “I kept working my butt off and now it’s really paying off”.

- **Asked for help,** was also a needed strategy by several of the participants as one stated: “You can’t do it on your own, so it’s important that you can ask for help when you need to”.

- **Found another way,** proved necessary in order to get the wanted results: “I realized that my plan wasn’t working, so I had to try a different approach”.

**Outcomes:** This higher order theme covered 25 raw data units under 4 raw data themes:

- **Experience,** as the way of getting experience was the primary most expressed outcome: “We learned from all of our mistakes”, “The frustration made me work harder and think outside the box”.

- **Self-confidence,** was the outcome much of the experience gained from working for free: “I was tough working for free, but the more I did it the more I learned and the more confident I got when I worked with the clients”.

Drive, for success and wanting more was an outcome from seeing the business starting to form: “I started getting a few clients, and I started believing that this could actually work, so I worked even harder to make it happen”.

Getting more established, was expressed as an important result from all the hard work: “I was contacted by a golf club to do a seminar because someone had recommended me”.

Identifying the successful transition into the novice professional phase

Through the development of the advanced student phase the participants went through several demands and barriers and each one of the participants in turn found the necessary resources and coping strategies they needed to make a successful transition into the next phase of their career, i.e. becoming novice consultants. The points of successful transitions were identified by the participants as follows:

For Participant #1 the point of transition was when:
“/…/ I had my own business (health and life coaching) but when I finished my MA (sport science) I shut down the health part, because it was the sport psychology that interested me, and after the first year I was hired as a research assistant in Odense full time, but I kept working in the applied field cause I wanted to keep improving my skills in coaching and presentation. /…/ Then, as I was doing my Ph.D, I always kept working with clients and my focus was always there. /…/ Some stuff was volunteer work and then later I started getting payed, it was all to build up a name”.

Participant #2 identified her transition as:
“After I finished my education in Halmstad, I was working freelance, I was working with those clients I got ad hoc and there were a lot of figure skaters. /…/ Then I started working with ice hockey players. After, I did a coaching seminar with one of their coaches, and after this I also started working with some table tennis players. I got connected because, I educated other coaches”.

Participant #3 identified her transition as:
“During my MA I started my own business and I was very calculated in the sense of where could I benefit most from my time. I wanted to learn and work, so sometimes I didn’t show up for lectures if I thought I could read it on my own and then spent that time working. /…/ I was extremely focused on how can I get this up and running. /…/ Then when I finished my MA I had gotten a partnership up and running with a clinic in Valby (Copenhagen) where I had sessions with athletes and the business was going pretty well… not well enough to live off, but I made money”.

Participant #4, who only recently made this transition due to his short time working as a sport psychology consultant, stated:
“About two years ago I had my assignment working on my own with an athlete and then it’s slowly been more and more. I even had a talk with my mentor a while ago where I said, now I ended where I said I didn’t want to be. (hehe…)”.

Participant #5 had the opportunity to both teach and work with students describing his transition as:
“I was hired to teach sport psychology at a boarding school/…/ And then we, two of my colleagues and I, started a kind of peer group where we discussed sport psychology and
then we actually started having some sessions with some of the students at the school, so tried what we knew and then we talked about it afterwards and that was the first time I really worked as a consultant”.

Participant #6 was very clear about when he started getting experience, saying: “We wanted to know how things were done in the field, so we, my partner and I, did a pretty comprehensive project for our BA thesis, where we coached and had goal setting sessions with four football players. It was really fun and it was a catalyst for many things after. And our participants from the study also became our first clients”.

Discussion
The purpose of the study was to determine what motivated the participants to begin a career in applied sport psychology, and to examine the transitional process the participants experienced during the phases from student to novice professional in their careers.

Motivation for applied sport psychology
The participants all claimed that their motivation for pursuing a career in applied sport psychology was guided by their own passion for sport. This is not surprising since it is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g. Simons & Andersen, 1995; Roper, 2008; McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Furthermore, the participants expressed that the thirst for understanding why and how their mentality affected their own performance in younger years, was a huge contributor to their chosen career path. This factor was also expressed as having been a motivating factor for consultants in previous research (McCarthy & Jones, 2014). Some of the participants in this study expressed that they never planned to work in applied sport psychology but when the opportunity arose they jumped at the chance, because the interest in sport development was always there. This, too, is consistent with previous findings made by McCarthy & Jones (2014) from consultants both European and American.

It is not surprising that motivating factors to pursue a career in applied sport psychology for the participants (Danish consultant) are consistent with previous findings since the majority of consultants seem to come from an athletic background of some level. This could suggests that, applied sport psychology as a field could provide a good transition into an academic career while staying connected with sports.

Dynamics of the parameters across the two transitional phases from student to novice professional.
Demands. By far the largest number of demands was found in the second of the two transitional phases immediately preceding the novice professional phase. This increase could indicate that, finding and choosing an educational pathway is only the tip of the iceberg. After the life of a student, it’s a hard road to make it as a professional consultant in the field of applied sport psychology. Whereas, the students, in the beginning phase, face struggles as finding the desired education which may mean leaving Denmark for a few years while studying, and advanced students have to spend a great deal of their time working for free while trying to build a network, often alongside of fulltime jobs or studies.

Resources. Just as the amount of demands increased in the advanced student phase after the educational path was found and initiated, so too did the needed resources. The Drive to learn was reported by all participants to be the most important resource during both transitional phases. This suggesting that having a thirst for continued development could be key to making a successful transition in both phases. Family support was an important resource for both phases of the beginning and the advanced students. However, for the advanced students, external resources, such as other income, were considered paramount
when starting out in the professional field. This was especially needed, because building a clientele takes a long time and getting enough business for full-time work could take years. Working and studying simultaneously was a necessity for several of the participants. Therefore, Confidence in their chosen patch and personal drive was a key factor in order to advance. Mentors and help from partners or peers were also seen as invaluable recourses suggesting that, to make a successful transition into the professional field of applied sport psychology help could be needed.

**Barriers.** The barriers experienced by the participants during the two phases of development were very different in nature. Whereas, the students, in the beginning phase, had concerns revolving around finding the right educational options and with a feeling of frustration, both because of the lack of information and people to ask for help. The advanced student phase, the participants seemed more worried about being able to make a sustainable living from their chosen career path, how to get experience and trying to balance school, work and sometimes even family simultaneously.

**Coping strategies.** The ways of coping with the demands and barriers faced by the students in the beginning phase boils down to persistence and learning to find your own information. Although these coping strategies weren’t identical to the ones favored in the advanced student phase, they do seem like valuable lessons considering that thinking outside the box, i.e. finding another way and working hard, could be needed strategies for aspiring practitioners who want to make a successful transition into the novice professional phase. It does, however, seem like there is a bit more help to find from more experienced peers once school is over, since the advanced students asked for help as a successful coping strategy.

**Outcomes.** For the students in the beginning phase, outcomes related to finding an educational pathway showed that they either found a pathway in Denmark or that they moved abroad to study. For the advanced student phase, the result of their hard work was more experience, self-confidence and in the end getting more established and it also seemed like drive for further development was both a resource and an outcome in advanced student phase.

In summary, each phase had specific demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and outcomes. However, there were a few themes that occurred through both phases. A strong Personal drive seems to be a much-needed resource across both developmental phases. Persistence and Hard work also shows to be an ongoing theme both as a coping strategy, demand and resource across both transitional phases.

**Results related to the theoretical frameworks**

When conducting the interview for this study the participants were able to identify and elaborate on the transitional parameters, i.e. the demands, resources, barriers, and coping strategies suggested by the athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003). Suggesting that this theoretical model could suitable for investigating transitional experiences made by not only athletes, but also practitioners of applied sport psychology in both their vocational development.

The theory of therapist development made by Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) was not originally designed for consultants in applied sport psychology, but for clinical therapists, however the transitional phases experienced by the participants in this study seem very similar if not identical to the vocational transitions faced by the clinical therapists. This to suggests that the theoretical approach is equally suited for outlining their educational and vocational development and transitions.
Results related to previous research

When examining the transitional phases experienced by the participants, both similarities with previous research and uniqueness were found. During the advanced student phase, the participants listed having a passion for sport as a demand to better understand the mentality of athletes, as well as being familiar with many sports. This was consistent with findings by McCarthy & Jones (2014), however, willingness to travel to other countries in search of better educational options is a new find and may therefore, be unique for Danish practitioners. However, similar findings may occur in other countries with a similar situation.

Being frustrated about the lack of learning opportunities and the hardship of finding work is also consistent with previous findings (e.g. Tod et al., 2007; McCarthy & Jones, 2014), and having a hard time finding mentors and learning experiences in the beginning is also consistent with previous research (Roper, 2008).

Much like Stambulova and Johnson (2010) found in Swedish students, the Danish participants reported using their coaching experience as resources and their drive for development to overcome the demands in the early phases of their career. The unique find in this study was that, some reported that, stubbornness seemed to play a role in being able to further the development of their own career.

For the development of the advanced students, hard work seemed to be both a demand and coping strategy underlining the need for a strong motivation and a drive for learning in order to succeed. This was also consistent with previous findings from research on the developmental phase of neophyte practitioners in the field (Tod et al., 2007; McCarthy & Jones, 2014) suggesting that the lack in the educational system in Denmark is not the only reason why the Danish students have to work hard but that making it in this business is hard work no matter where you want to make a name for yourself.

Building a network has been seen as one of the greatest challenges by many neophyte practitioners not just the Danish ones (i.e. McCarthy & Jones, 2014) and the lack of experience faced by the students in this phase was to be expected (i.e. Tod et al., 2007, Stambulova & Johnson). Asking for help has been, for many, a great source of help when the option was available both as stated by the Danish consultants and by students and novice practitioners in Sweden (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010) and Australia (Tod et al., 2007).

Method discussion

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study since the aim was to investigate the individual experiences of established practitioners in the Danish field of applied sport psychology. Doing qualitative research creates limitations due to its time-consuming nature limiting the number of participants compared to quantitative approaches, such as surveys or questionnaires. The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that, unlike a quantitative approach, it lets the participants tell a story in their own words and thus, making it possible to get more detailed and unique answers (Christensen et al., 2007). A limitation of this approach is that all the data is retrospective and thus is dependent on the memories of the participants. This can create recollection bias, because the informants may have a hard time remembering events from over 10 years ago. The interview guide could create limitations by not being adequate to generate sufficient data, thus creating the need for a second follow-up interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

One strength of the study was that the interview guide was pilot-tested. This gives the researcher the chance to get familiar with the interview guide, listen to the recordings and re-evaluate some of the less open-ended questions and adjust, so some of the initial mistakes can be corrected before the real interviews (Christensen et al., 2007).

Another possible limitation when collecting qualitative data is, the risk of social desirability bias, which could present with false data if the participants were to change their
answers to appear better in their own eyes than they are (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). An attempt to avoid this was done by ensuring the participants that all data would be kept confidential and anonymous and by explaining that their information could be a valuable help for the next generation of practitioners.

When selecting of the participants, the majority were chosen from the list of Team Denmark’s permanent staff or external network and for geographical convenience, only practitioners in the Copenhagen area was chosen. A limitation of this type of selection is that it is hard to generalize the results to the population other than the one participating in the study (Christensen et al., 2007). This also means that there could be other potential participants who could have made interesting contributions to the study, but were never contacted.

The advantage of this selection is, that the list of Team Denmark’s chosen consultants should help to insure that the participants are established in the Danish field of applied sport psychology and that the search was relatively fast. The limitation of this search method is that the network of Team Denmark’s consultant is relatively small (only 4 internal + 10 external) only eight in total who works in or around Copenhagen.

The one participant, who lived outside of Denmark and therefore interviewed through Skype, was only added because she and the researcher had a personal relationship. Having a personal relationship with an informant has the upside the interviewer having previous knowledge of the person’s history and is therefore, able to guide the conversation in the desired direction during an interview. However, it may have the downside that the informant purposely avoids sensitive topics out of shame or because of a feeling that it could affect the personal relationship between the interviewer and the informant, making it harder to get the needed information (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

All interviews were, for the convenience of the participants, undertaken at their place of work. The benefit of having the interview in a place convenience and familiar to the participants, is that it may help them to feel more comfortable and therefore, give more genuine and truthful answers. A limitation with conducting the interviews at the informants’ workplace is, that they may feel too comfortable and thus taking the conversation in an undesirable direction generating useless and time-consuming data (Christensen et al., 2007).

Implications of this study

This study can be used as a guide or educational aid for aspiring Danish sport psychology practitioners who are interested in getting an indication of what to expect when pursuing an education in applied sport psychology. As well as, what can be expected from them during the first couple of years both presiding education start and during the educational years to make successful transitions into the professional field. By using the information from this study, the aspiring practitioners may get a better understanding of what to expect and thus could be better prepared and equipped to handle the predicted obstacles when they appear.

This paper makes no suggestion that there is only one way to succeed, but merely illustrates the experiences made by some of the people who have managed to become established and successful in the field. The results of this study can also be used to see the specific coping mechanisms that was used by the established practitioners when they first started out.

Furthermore, for the aspiring students in sport psychology, this study could provide an interesting insight into the career beginnings of some of the best in the Danish field. As well as, showing that it took a lot of hard work for them. This may motivate students struggling to make it in the field. At the same time, the results from this study could also help students who are unsure whether they want to pursue applied sport psychology as a career or choose another career path.
This study could also be used as information for the Danish educational system and shine a light on the fact that a better system is needed for students who are interested in an applied sport psychology education.

When discussing the most important learning experience made by the participants, the primary and most important thing to get a successful career was building a network and pulling on all the strings you have to get your name out there. Being successful and being able to financially support a family solely by being a sport psychology consultant is not easy and it takes a lot of hard work, passion and dedication to succeed in the competitive field of applied sport psychology. This, as well as a willingness to work in related fields and even for free to get experience, also seems like something aspiring practitioners need to consider when deciding to pursue a career in applied sport psychology.

When researching their educational pathway, the aspiring practitioners should not take no for an answer, but make thorough research and keep applying until they get to where they want. This too, could take a lot of hard work and patience.

Future research

The reflections of the established Danish practitioners gave an insight into what it was like for them when they first started their career, how many of them started their career because of their passion for sport and competition and how the drive they had from competitive sport seemed to have helped them develop in the hard business of applied sport psychology.

Since there is, to my knowledge, no information on how the participants got to where they are in terms of career pathways, further insight into the next phases after the participants’ successful transitions into the novice professional phase, could provide interesting information. Also, this could be of great help to the next generation of consultants, because it provides knowledge about what to expect during the continued transitional different phases of development. This could then work as a guide to possible ways of better development in the career for the neophyte practitioners in the field of applied sport psychology. Information on what ways to take and foremost, what ways not to take may eliminate a lot of the frustration for the new practitioners. A new study based on the later phases in Rønnestad and Skovholt’s model of career development (2003) in combination with the model for career transition (Stambulova, 2003) could reveal interesting results from the Danish practitioners. It may however, be difficult to get enough participants to represent each phase, because of the lack of consultants.

Because education in Sweden is a distinct possibility for Danish students, it would be interesting to see if Swedish consultants go through the same transitions in terms of demands, resources, barriers and coping strategies as the Danish consultants. If not, this could be an indication that aspiring practitioners in Denmark may avoid much of the hardship they faced preceding their education by undertaking it in Sweden instead of staying in their own country during education and training.

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the participation and help of others. For this reason, I would in particular like to thank my supervisor Prof. Natalia Stambulova for her supervision, guidance, ideas and not least patience during the project. I would also like to thank the participants who volunteered their time and personal narratives for the study.
References


## Appendix 1
### Interviewguide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hovedpunkter:</th>
<th>Stikord:</th>
<th>Spørgsmål:</th>
<th>Kommentarer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hvad er formålet med interview?</td>
<td>- Jeg ønsker at undersøge karriereovergange for etablerede danske idrætspsykologer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramme for interviewet:</td>
<td>- Tidsramme</td>
<td>- Interviewet vil vare ca. 45 min.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Etiske aspekter, databehandling.</td>
<td>- Jeg vil anvende digitalt udstyr til at optage samtalen.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tilladelse til at optage samtalen.</td>
<td>- Alle oplysninger vil være anonyme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Præsentation af konsulenten:</td>
<td>- Konsulentens professionelle baggrund:</td>
<td>- Vil du ikke fortæl mig om dig selv?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Har du selv en sportslig baggrund?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Hvorfor blev du interesseret i idrætspsykologi?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduktion til idrætspsykologi</td>
<td>- Tidsline.</td>
<td>- Hvad var din første oplevelse med idrætspsykologi?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uddannelse</td>
<td>- Uddannelse</td>
<td>- Hvordan startede din uddannelse inden for idrætspsykologi?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Træning</td>
<td>- Hvilken praktisk læring havde du?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mentor?</td>
<td>- Havde du mulighed for at være i &quot;praktik hos nogen&quot;? I så fald hvem og hvordan?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionelle karriere:</td>
<td>- Arbejdsmuligheder:</td>
<td>- Hvilke arbejdsmuligheder</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Overgange</td>
<td>var der da du ville starte?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Besværheder/barrierer?</td>
<td>- Kan du fortælle om din karriere?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kompetencer:</td>
<td>- Hvordan har din karriere udformet sig?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Råd til den næste generation af idrætspsykologer?</td>
<td>- Hvordan startede du i det praktiske felt?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Åbning</td>
<td>- Var der nogle barrierer ved at skaffe; arbejdsmuligheder kollegaer/ klienter?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hvilke kompetencer er vigtige for en idrætspsykolog?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hvis du skulle rådgive nye konsulenter på vej ind i det praktiske felt, hvad ville du så sige til dem?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Afrunding**

| - 5 min igen. | - Er der noget jeg ikke havde tænkt på at spørge om? |
| - Er der noget jeg ikke havde tænkt på at spørge om? |
| - Har du nogle spørgsmål til mig? |

**Opsummering af interview:**

| - Hvad har jeg lært? |
| - Hvilke kommentarer kommer konsulenten med. |

**Tak for hjælpen:**

| - Mange tak for din deltagelse. |
| - Kontakt ang. Follow-up. |

| - Er det muligt at jeg må kontakte dig i det nye år ang. yderligere spørgsmål? |
Michael Felding
BS Sport and Health