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**A Longitudinal Study of Power Relations in a British Olympic Sport Organisation**

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### Abstract

The purpose was to examine the power relations during a change of culture in an Olympic sports organisation in the United Kingdom. We conducted a 16-month longitudinal study combining Action Research and Grounded Theory. Data collection included ethnography and focus group discussion (n=10), with athletes, coaches, parents, and the national governing body. We supplemented these with twenty-six interviews with stakeholders, and we analysed data using grounded theory. The core concept found was power relations further divided into systemic power and informational power. Systemic power (e.g. formal authority to reward or punish) denotes how the NGB sought to implement change from the top-down and impose new strategies on the organisation. The informational power (e.g. tacit feeling of oneness and belonging) represented how individuals and subunits mobilised coalitions to support or obstruct the sports organisation's agenda. Olympic sports organisations should consider the influence of s power when undertaking a change of culture.

*Keywords:* Conflict, power, elite sports, organisational psychology

39           A Longitudinal Study of Power Relations in a British Olympic Sport Organisation  
40           Research recognises that organisational culture can influence talent development in sport  
41 (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018) since the convergence of evidence points to the organisational  
42 context as having the potential to impact on individuals' well-being and performance (Fletcher &  
43 Wagstaff, 2009). Culture could, thus, both nourish and malnourish those participating in sport (cf.  
44 Henriksen et al., 2019; Schinke, Stambulova, Si, & Moore, 2018). The International Olympic  
45 Committee consensus statement (see Bergeron et al., 2015) asserts that there is an urgent need to  
46 extend our understanding of how culture influences youth development.

47           Existing research highlights organisational culture's influence on performance outcomes at  
48 the Olympic games (cf. Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001), talent development (cf.  
49 Henriksen, Larsen, & Christensen, 2014; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010), performance  
50 leadership (Arnold, Fletcher, & Molyneux, 2012), and athlete thriving (Brown & Arnold, 2019).  
51 Organisational life in sport is, therefore, a growing research area in sport psychology (cf. Wagstaff  
52 & Burton-Wylie, 2018) and sport management (cf. Maitland, Hills, & Rhind, 2015).

53           So far, organisational culture research has, for the most part, adopted a leader-centric  
54 approach to culture (cf. Maitland, Hills, & Rhind, 2015). A recent review by Wagstaff and Burton-  
55 Wylie (2018) observed that 70% of sports research used this perspective. However, Meyerson and  
56 Martin (1987) explain that using this perspective risks neglecting the social processes that might  
57 produce conflict or change. Furthermore, Girginov (2006) explains that a limitation of this line of  
58 research is that focusing on leaders might give an impression of consistency.

59           Instead, Alvesson (2017) suggests that researchers should probe underneath the surface  
60 (e.g. backstage politics and behind the scenes social processes) to examine the social complexities  
61 of organisational life. There is a potential for extending our collective knowledge by focusing on  
62 the social processes that occur as cultures change over time. Probing the underlying processes

63 could help understand what drives and facilitates people's and organisation's behaviours in sport  
64 (Girginov, 2010).

### 65 **A longitudinal study into a change of culture in elite sports in the United Kingdom**

66 It is time to extend organisational culture research because the sports sector is under more  
67 scrutiny than ever before due to several examples of destructive cultures in sport (cf. Daniels,  
68 2017; Grey-Thompson, 2017; King, 2012). This article is a part of an extensive longitudinal study  
69 aiming to unpick the complexity of a change of culture in elite sports in the United Kingdom (UK).

70 One study (Feddersen, Morris, Littlewood, & Richardson, 2020) focused on how a  
71 destructive culture emerged and perpetuated in a sport. The findings in that study showed that the  
72 severe conflict could lead to a destructive culture if mitigated by subprocesses of rationalising and  
73 legitimising destructive behaviours. A second study (Feddersen, Morris, Abrahamsen, Littlewood,  
74 & Richardson, 2020) examined the influence of macrocultural change (e.g. changing norms and  
75 political context for elite sports) on national governing bodies (NGB) in the United Kingdom.  
76 Doing so involved focusing on interorganisational systemic power relations between NGBs and  
77 governing sports organisations (e.g. UK Sport; GSO).

78 The substantial contribution of this article is that it adds empirical insights into the nuances  
79 of systemic and informational power relations. The current article is focused on an analysis of  
80 power relations, and we focus on the entanglement of intraorganisational power relations.  
81 Focusing on power relations during a change process is a unique contribution to the field. It is  
82 unique because it probes the processes that occur beneath the surface of an organisational culture,  
83 which is made possible by the longitudinal data. The purpose of the current study is to examine  
84 the power relations during a change of culture in an Olympic sports organisation in the United  
85 Kingdom. The research questions were to examine (1) a change of culture process in an Olympic  
86 sport, and (2) the power processes that regulate the change process.

## 87 **Conceptual Framework: Organisational culture**

88 Referring to Meyerson and Martin (1987), we treat the organisation (i.e. the Olympic sports  
89 organisation) as a culture. According to Alvesson (2017) and Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, and Holt  
90 (2014), such a view provide us with the opportunity for a rich analysis of the 'behind-the-scenes'  
91 organisational life. As suggested by Mannion and Davies (2016), focusing on an organisation as a  
92 culture allows us to research inconsistencies and disagreements. For the current study, we treat the  
93 setting as an open system, which means that studying culture entails studying the collisions and  
94 conflicts with subunits outside NGB-1. In line with Meyerson and Martin (1987), there are many  
95 sources of cultural content, and the current study draws attention to diffuse and unintentional  
96 sources of change as well as how subunits negotiate change processes.

97 From this position, culture is not assumed to be a priori controllable (Mannion & Davies,  
98 2016). It is, instead, differentiated (Meyerson & Martin, 1987). The critical part of this  
99 organisational culture analysis was, therefore, how subunits met, collided, waged conflict,  
100 mediated, and found consensus. We pay attention to non-leader centred sources of change  
101 (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Our conceptualisation of the culture obliges us to recognise  
102 that power relations may influence the change process (Morgan, 2011). This perspective on culture  
103 links cultural change to diffuse processes (e.g. power relations) and unintentional sources (e.g.  
104 changes to policy or funding; Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

105 Mannion and Davies (2016) explain that there are two distinct types of change. First and  
106 second-order change. First, a change *in* culture. This process represents cultural continuity where  
107 a culture adapts by capitalising on history and traditions. Second, a change *of* culture. In contrast,  
108 this process stands for a radical break with the past to overhaul a stagnant or deficient culture. This  
109 type of change is radical and often invoked in response to a growing crisis or deficiency in the  
110 existing culture (Mannion & Davies, 2016).

111           **Power relations in organisational cultures.** Power relations might be one of the critical  
112 features in organisational change (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004) and organisational culture  
113 change (Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2015). Heinze and Lu (2017) suggest that examining  
114 power in sports governing bodies may shed light on the underlying processes of institutional  
115 change. Considering organisational cultures, Alvesson (2017) argues that power relations could be  
116 a key feature for understanding the social processes in changing organisational cultures. Power in  
117 organisations has been suggested being power plays between people or used for instruments of  
118 domination (cf. Morgan, 2006b). Understanding power relations may be critical to understanding  
119 how individuals and groups react during change (Dowling, Leopkey, & Smith, 2018).

120           With this in mind, we assume that power is an interdependent relational capacity emerging  
121 from the continuous interactions between people (Foucault, 1979). Frisby (2005) asserts that  
122 noticing entrenched power relations and who occupy positions of power can generate a deeper  
123 understanding of culture in sports organisations. A key assumption in this paper is, therefore, that  
124 the organisation culture studied is best viewed by the changing power relations. Research from  
125 other contexts (e.g. architectural companies and prisons) suggests that power could come in the  
126 form of 'silent hierarchies' in groups (e.g., informal leaders) and 'invisible walls' (e.g., between  
127 senior and junior staff; Brown, Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2010), and as an attribute that  
128 individuals can wield to control others (Scruton, 2016).

129           French and Raven (1959) suggested a typology for six bases of power: reward, coercive,  
130 legitimate, expert, referent, and informational power. This typology has been widely used in  
131 management and organisation studies (Gearin, 2017; Munduate & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2003;  
132 Tang, 2019), physical education (e.g. Lyngstad, 2017), and sport psychology (Potrac & Jones,  
133 2009; Rylander, 2015; Turman, 2006). Yet, the bases of power are rarely easily divided as they  
134 are in theory. Further, they are viewed as a resource that individuals can use or wield to change

135 beliefs (Lyngstad, 2017). As mentioned above, we assume that power is relational, capillary,  
136 emerging from continuous interactions and not a resource. French and Raven's (1959) typology  
137 does, however, provide labels that are helpful to explain different bases of power.

138 Morgan (2006a) suggests that examining power relations should involve examining  
139 different interests because it can help identify subunits (e.g. groups or individuals) and conflict.  
140 We, therefore, consider the importance of various subunits in the sport. In line with Martin and  
141 Meyerson (1987), we assume that the organisation is an arbitrary boundary a collection of subunits.  
142 We also assume that different subunits could shed light on the unique features of how power  
143 relations influence change (Mannion & Davies, 2016).

144 Subunits could represent orthogonal subunits that accept the change happening around  
145 them (Mannion & Davies, 2016). Subunits might be counter-subunits representing disagreements  
146 (e.g. conflicting interests). It is possible that some subunits emerge as a response to changes that  
147 are aligned to their interests, thus amplifying and supporting other cultures (Mannion & Davies,  
148 2016). So, knowledge of the negative constraining aspects of organisational culture might illustrate  
149 why conflict arises. Examining how subunits meet could also show how ambiguity and complexity  
150 form how culture emerges over time from everyday interactions of dynamic power relations  
151 (Bonder, Martin, & Miracle, 2004).

## 152 Method

153 The Participatory Inquiry Paradigm framed this study (Heron & Reason, 1997). Adopting  
154 a participative epistemology, we integrated Action Research (AR) for researching change (Duus,  
155 Husted, Kildedal, Laursen, & Tofteng, 2014) and Grounded Theory (GT) for theorising processes  
156 (Holt, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. Integrating AR and GT allowed the first-author to be involved in the change process,

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Grounded Theory, please refer to (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

157 which moves science beyond observing what 'is' (cf. Gergen, 2015) and rethinks research as an  
158 active, constructive process. We included GT because it is a transparent method that illuminates  
159 how the analysis process links to findings, which is an issue AR has been criticised for in the past.  
160 Integrating GT and AR helps us make the analysis of change (AR) more transparent and illuminate  
161 the processes that regulate change (Dick, 2007).

162 We are focused on the social processes that influence the change process rather than  
163 evaluating the 'success' of the change. In adopting a participative approach, we aimed to engage  
164 the participants in unravelling the social processes as they occur (Gergen, 2015). Bringing AR and  
165 GT together in this study means that the quality criteria include a democratic research process and  
166 using all the core elements of GT to enhance the iterative analysis at critical points (e.g. theoretical  
167 sampling).

### 168 **The Olympic Sports Context in the United Kingdom**

169 The sports governance in UK talent development includes a range of support agencies (see  
170 Grix and Phillpots 2011). The two most relevant organisations in the current study were UK Sport  
171 and Sport England, which act as critical paymasters to Olympic sports in the UK (cf. Houlihan &  
172 Green, 2009). Other organisations relevant to the study were the English Institute of Sport (EIS),  
173 which provides sport science support services; the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS)  
174 supporting dual-career athletes; and UK Coaching, which oversees the development of coach  
175 education. As a part of the larger study, we analysed the macroculture in British Olympic sports,  
176 which showed that “political will had shielded Olympic sports from societal changes. However,  
177 macrocultural changes to social standards and the power of athletes highlighted that the  
178 organisational culture was increasingly deficient and required radical changes” (Feddersen,  
179 Morris, Abrahamsen, et al., 2020). Pertinent to the case organisation (see below) was that UK Sport  
180 and Sport England used their influence to provoke change.



## 181 **Case Organisation**

182           The case organisation, NGB-1, governs a longstanding multi-event Olympic sport with  
183 approximately 15000 members. The sport is organised as a dispersed landscape of smaller clubs  
184 or with few athletes training with a personal coach. At the end of 2016, UK Sport declared that it  
185 was not probable that the sport would medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and, therefore,  
186 removed all funding from the sport. The funding cut meant that NGB-1 retrenched to core services  
187 (e.g. safeguarding, coach development) to ensure financial stability.

188           Assuming that the case organisation is an ‘open-system’ (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, p.  
189 634), we analyse a change of culture in NGB-1 from the vantage point of the Talent Team. The  
190 Talent Team is a subunit in a larger organisation encompassing NGB-1 and the community within  
191 the sport. The Talent Team was hired on the back of two years funding from Sport England (April  
192 2017 – April 2019) to fund a Talent Programme, with a provisional extension for another two  
193 years. Today, the organisation receives funding from Sport England for a talent development  
194 programme and from the UK Sport aspiration fund. We have gone to great lengths to protect the  
195 anonymity of the participants and the organisation. Yet, we strive to show a rich picture of the  
196 change of culture process.

## 197 **Data Collection Strategies**

198           *Ethnographic observations.* The first author was embedded in NGB-1 for sixteen months.  
199 This immersion entailed drawing together a meaningful portrait of events as they unfolded (Krane  
200 & Baird, 2005). These events were followed at the offices of NGB-1, Youth National Team camps,  
201 coach development courses, competitions, and public events. The first-author also carried out tasks  
202 of day-to-day operations linked to the action strategies presented below (e.g. season planning) and  
203 assumed the role of a critical friend (e.g. providing a 'mirror'; Costa & Kallick, 1993). The field

204 notes were expressed in memos inspired by the conditional/consequential matrix, and the  
205 analytical tool named the diagram (see Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

206         The ethnographic observations changed from the reconnaissance phase to the Grounded  
207 Action cycles. The aim of the reconnaissance was to describe the context before conceptualising  
208 the change processes (Holt, 2016). The observation guide in the reconnaissance phase was open  
209 and focused on who was in the context as well as their roles (e.g. Talent Manager, coach, athlete),  
210 motivations (e.g. why are you here?), and where the sport happened (e.g. clubs, regions, countries).  
211 In contrast, the aim of the cycles was to conceptualise change and the features that regulated this  
212 change. The observation guide in the cycles was driven by data (i.e., informed by previous data  
213 from focus groups, observations, interviews and documents) and focused on how people  
214 influenced change, why they carried out certain behaviours, and who could influence change  
215 (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

216         **Focus group discussions.** The first author carried out ten focus group discussions lasting  
217 from 40 – 130 minutes (see Table 1). The aim was to engage participants in dialogue and examine  
218 group interactions. Hence, being sensitive to interpersonal communication helped highlight  
219 subcultural understandings of the change process (Kitzinger, 1995). The first focus group  
220 discussion was carried out with the Talent Team. This discussion aimed to identify other relevant  
221 groups (e.g. who are the most important stakeholders? What should I ask them about?) and explore  
222 the context (e.g. what do I need to know about this sport?). The following groups included Parents  
223 of Athletes, Coaches, and Athletes (see Table 1). During these, we aimed to clarify meaningful  
224 experiences of previous talent programmes (e.g. what was good and bad about previous talent  
225 programmes) and the most salient perceptions of the context (e.g. what should I notice about your  
226 sport?).

227

228 Table 1.

229 Overview of Participants.

<b>Initial Sample</b>	<b>Group Label</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Focus groups</b>			
Talent Team	TT1	4	1 female, 3 male
Athletes	A1	7	3 female; 4 male
	A2	8	4 female, 4 male
Coaches	C1	3	3 male
	C2	3	1 female; 2 male
	C3	2	2 male
	C4	2	2 male
Parents	P1	10	6 female; 4 male
<b>Individual Interviews</b>			
Assistant Talent Manager	ATM	1	Male
Youth GBR Head Talent Coach	GBR	1	Male
Talent Manager	TM	1	Male
<b>Theoretical Sampling 1</b>			
<b>Group Label</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Focus groups</b>			
Parents of athletes in underserved areas	P2	2	1 female; 1 male
<b>Theoretical Sampling 2</b>			
<b>Group Label</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Individual Interviews</b>			
Heads of Talent from other Olympic sports		3	All male
Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme Advisor		1	Male
UK Coaching		1	Male
UK Sports		1	Male
Sport England		1	Female
English Institute of Sport		1	Male
UK University Sports Scholars Programme		1	Female
<b>Theoretical Sampling 3</b>			
<b>Group Label</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Individual Interviews</b>			
Members of counter subcultures		1	All male
<b>Theoretical Sampling 4</b>			
<b>Group Label</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Focus Groups</b>			
Talent Team	TT2	5	All male
<b>Individual Interviews</b>			
Talent Manager		1	Male
Head of Coach Development		1	Male
Management		1	Female

230

231 **Documents.** We collected official documents (e.g. policy documents, official papers

232 describing the mission and structure, training programmes) from the NGB and clubs in the sport

233 to prepare the principal researcher for the first visit and to serve as supplementary data on how  
234 policies and regulation might change throughout the study.

235 **Semi-structured interviews.** The first author carried out twenty-two individual interviews  
236 (35-75 min) with participants (see Table 1). All interviews followed a semi-structured interview  
237 guide (cf. Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The interview guide was developed from earlier data  
238 elicited from ethnography, focus groups, and the documents. Developing the interview guide from  
239 the data allowed the first-author to probe perceptions of the ongoing events of the change process  
240 (e.g. how do you experience the change?; who influenced the change process?; and who are the  
241 most influential individuals/organisations and why?).

242 Following Weed (2017), we identified participants when anomalies appeared during the  
243 ongoing process of data collection and analysis (see Table 1). The first author conducted data  
244 collection from theoretical sampling during all cycles (Cycle 1: Theoretical Sampling 1; Cycle 2-  
245 4: Theoretical Sampling 2 and 3). Participants from theoretical sampling 2 participated in two  
246 individual semi-interviews. The interview guides were based on data collected earlier in the study  
247 focused on exploring inter-organisational conflict and power plays (e.g. how do you experience  
248 your relationship with UK Sport/Sport England?). We decided to conduct these interviews with at  
249 least two months between the first and second interview. Many of the participants explained that  
250 they did not have time to participate in the interviews in person. We, therefore, used Skype to  
251 overcome issues of distance and pressurised schedules (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

## 252 **The Procedure, Analysis, and Rigour**

253 We carried out the main part of the research from July 2017 to November 2018 with some  
254 follow-up data during January to May 2019. It included two different processes. First, a  
255 reconnaissance phase that helped establish an understanding of the current working practices and  
256 context to identify change strategies (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2005). Second, four cycles, each

257 with an implementation and monitoring phase and a reflection and review phase (Feddersen,  
258 Morris, Littlewood, et al., 2020). The cycles were carried out in the following timeframe: (1) from  
259 September 2017 to November 2017, (2) from December 2017 to April 2018, (3) from May 2018  
260 to August 2018, and (4) from September 2018 to November 2018. The first cycle started during  
261 the reconnaissance in September 2017. It did so because the Talent Team started the Internal Team  
262 Development and Youth National Team Camps in September 2017 due to funding lasting two  
263 years. The analysis in the first two cycles focused on describing the change of culture processes.  
264 The last two cycles included theorising the processes. All phases included interrogating for  
265 theoretical saturation (see Weed, 2017), refining actions by implementing and studying the  
266 ongoing changes.

267 **Reconnaissance.** We first contacted five Summer Olympic NGBs in May 2017 via email  
268 after obtaining ethical approval from the university's ethics committee. These NGBs were  
269 identified based on funding changes in the wake of the 2016 Olympic Games. We agreed to carry  
270 out the research with one NGB (NGB-1). NGB-1 had just received new funding for talent and elite  
271 programmes and expressed significant interest in understanding how to change the organisation.

272 **Establishing a research group.** The first step of the collaboration was to negotiate consent  
273 for the longitudinal study. Second, the first author established a research group, labelled *Talent*  
274 *Team*. The group consisted of six members: the Talent Manager, the Head of Coach Development,  
275 the Talent Administrator, The Assistant Talent Manager, the GBR Head Talent Coach and the first  
276 author.

277 The Talent Team was established to integrate participants as co-researchers throughout the  
278 process. We did so by outlining shared, and role-specific tasks based on Kildedal and Lauersen  
279 (cf. 2014, p. 86). In adopting a collaborative approach, we looked to engage the participants in  
280 dialogue and move the participants from a vague commitment to cultural guides. Sbaraini, Carter,

281 Evans, and Blinkhorn (2011) explain that this can enhance the research by having insiders engage  
282 in a sense-making process of which knowledge applied to their practice.

283         The first author was a part of the Talent Team in an advisory role, which included ethical  
284 demands on the researcher and the possible consequences for the participants (Löfman, Pelkonen,  
285 & Pietilä, 2004). Having participants and the first author in a research group shows a willingness  
286 to relinquish the unilateral control that researchers have traditionally maintained. Iphofen (2013)  
287 relinquishing control might create tension between the goals of the research and the aims of the  
288 organisation. The collaboration, therefore, included empowering participants to be active in the  
289 research (e.g., including participants in the analysis) and help them be forceful in following their  
290 individual interests rather than those of the research (e.g., mentioning that it was critical that their  
291 work with the NGB was more important than supporting the research).

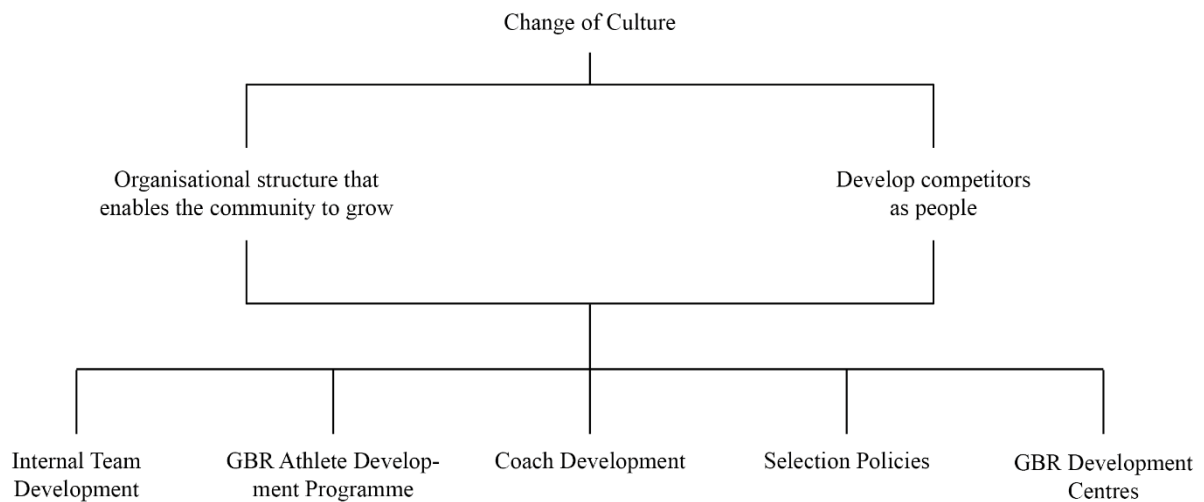
292         *Analysis in the reconnaissance.* The first author started open coding in June 2017 after  
293 obtaining organisational consent at the first meeting with the NGB. Memo-writing and introducing  
294 analytical tools from GT (i.e. the conditional/consequential matrix and the paradigm) helped  
295 conceptualise areas for change and a desired future state (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Kelle, 2007).  
296 The Talent Team discussed all concepts, and we identified new areas for consideration through  
297 theoretical sampling (cf. Weed, 2017): athletes in underserved areas and inter-organisational  
298 power plays (see Theoretical sampling 1 and 2 in Table 1).

299         *Ending the reconnaissance.* The reconnaissance ended with identifying change strategies  
300 based on the findings (see Findings section). It was evident that all participants agreed that the  
301 sport needed to change the prevailing culture. The Talent Team, in collaboration with the  
302 management in NGB-1, therefore, formulated a strategy for a change of culture. The strategy  
303 entailed transforming the prevailing culture due to a perceived growing deficiency (i.e., conflict  
304 and lack of results at the Olympic games; Mannion & Davies, 2016). Others have described such

305 change as 'frame breaking' possibly involving sharp shifts in strategy, power, structure, and  
 306 controls (Slack & Hinings, 1992).

307 The Talent Team formulated two overarching themes to guide their work. (1)  
 308 *Organisational structure that enabled the community to grow* was a response to findings showing  
 309 that the former centralisation of the sport to London had alienated the community in the sport. (2)  
 310 the Talent Team also argued for *developing competitors as people* since previous talent and elite  
 311 programmes in the sport had discouraged dual-careers. The Talent Team also formulated five  
 312 change strategies to operationalise the change of culture: Internal Team Development, GBR  
 313 Athlete Development Programme, Coach Development, Selection Policies, and GBR  
 314 Development Centres (see).

315



316

317 First, the Talent Team development included recruiting an Assistant Talent Manager, a  
 318 GBR [Event] Head Youth Coach, and identifying and recruiting contracted coaches. Second,  
 319 setting up GBR Athlete Development Programme was a part of the funding conditions from Sport  
 320 England. Doing so included developing a curriculum of technical, physical, tactical, and mental  
 321 skills. Third, updating coach development and philosophy entailed redesigning the coach

322 education pathway and included continued personal development opportunities for identified  
323 coaches. Fourth, new Selection Policies designing new policies and strategies for selection youth  
324 national teams. Last, setting up GBR Development Centres aimed to decentralise the sport from  
325 London to have ongoing communication with influential individuals and clubs all over the United  
326 Kingdom. The ambition was to establish three centres during the spring of 2018 and in time for  
327 the 2018/2019 season.

328 **Implementation and monitoring phase.** The Talent Team implemented the change  
329 strategies during the implementation and monitoring phases. Yet, the focus of this research was to  
330 conceptualise power relations.

331 *Analysis in the implementation and monitoring phase.* We shifted the focus from  
332 describing the prevailing context during the first cycle to analysing the underlying process. All  
333 Talent Team members engaged in open coding in all implementation and monitoring of action  
334 phases. The focus in the first two cycles was to open brand-new concepts regarding the change of  
335 culture process. This process involved analysing the data for adaptive changes (e.g. stages and  
336 sequences of action) taken in response to changing conditions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Power  
337 relations were not an explicit focus in the early data collection. However, the findings and memos  
338 during the first and second cycles suggested that power influenced change. We, therefore, focused  
339 on power relations during the last two cycles. These findings influenced the observation guide and  
340 interview guides to include a focus on power relations (e.g., what reasons do individuals and  
341 groups give for certain changes or non-changes?). In cycles three and four, the open coding process  
342 focused on adding any potential nuances to the emerging categories. This helped prevent early  
343 foreclosure by forcing the Talent Team to think outside the core categories (Corbin & Strauss,  
344 2015).

345 The practical approach was to carry out collaborative analysis at monthly meetings. In



346 adopting a participative approach, all members of the Talent Team discussed and compared new  
347 data to the earlier findings. This process aided us in creating analytical diversity. It also helped  
348 ensure our collective insights grounded the analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Weed, 2017).

349 **Review and reflect.** The review phase at the end of each cycle allowed the Talent Team  
350 to engage with the data analysis and discuss the emerging findings. These discussions also  
351 provided new data vis-à-vis contradictory views in the group (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Here,  
352 the Talent Team could iterate these by assessing how they fit the evolving understanding of the  
353 organisation.

354 *Analysis in the review and reflect phase.* The Talent Team engaged in conceptualising  
355 culture change processes during this phase and doing so involved reflecting on and reviewing the  
356 change strategies. The Talent Team assessed the structural, process, and contextual fit (see  
357 Mannion & Davies, 2016) as a part of this process. Engaging cultural insiders helped open unique  
358 cultural nuances and insights by comparing new understandings to previous findings from the  
359 reconnaissance (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

360 Going back and forth from concepts to categories indicated that counter subunits were  
361 crucial to the regulation of culture change processes. We identified and invited three individuals  
362 to take part in individual interviews. Yet, only one participant agreed given the sensitive nature of  
363 their behaviours (Theoretical Sampling 3; Table 1).

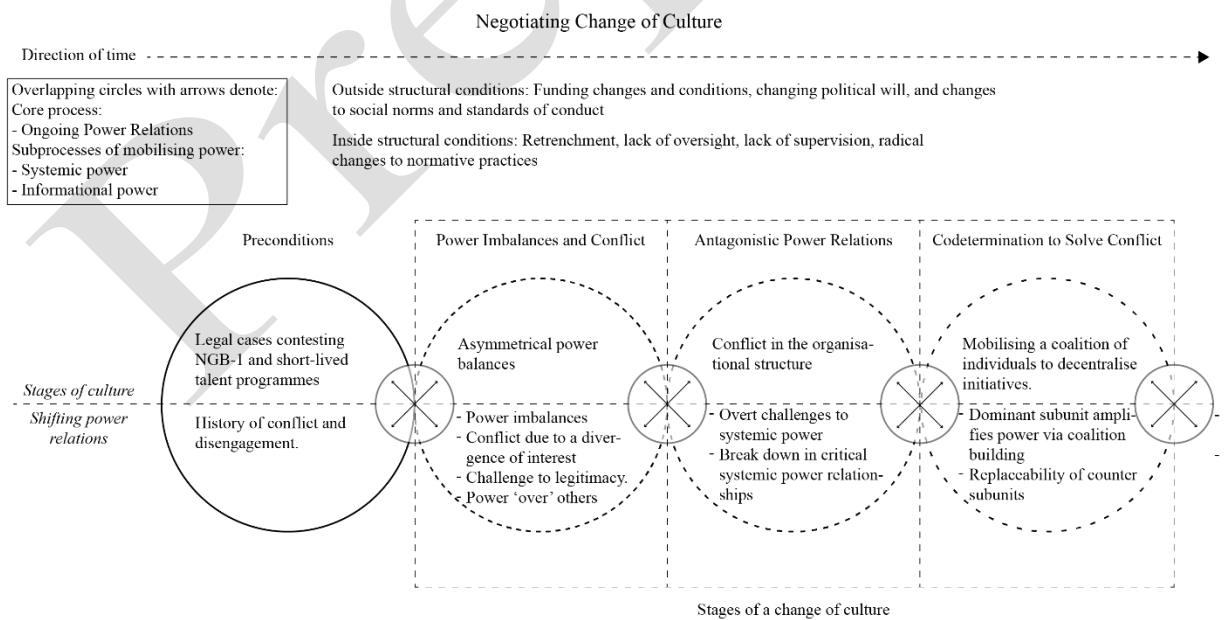
#### 364 **Terminating the Research**

365 The research ended when we experienced data saturation (Holt, 2016). The first author  
366 approached the rest of the Talent Team in August 2018 to interrogate for theoretical saturation.  
367 The Talent Team then went over the findings and discussed the relationships between the concepts  
368 and categories. The first author carried out two meetings with parents of athletes in September  
369 2018; three individual interviews in September, October, and November 2018; and one Focus

370 Group with the Talent Team in November 2018 as a part of this process (see Theoretical Sampling  
 371 4; Table 1). We also carried out one meeting with participants from two other NGBs and GSO  
 372 (participants identified in Theoretical Sampling 2). The aim of this meeting was to assess the  
 373 theoretical fit and modifiability to the elite sports context in the UK (Weed, 2017). Finally, the  
 374 first author's direct engagement with NGB-1 was terminated in November 2018.

375 **Findings**

376 The findings in the current article showed that at the core of culture was a dynamic process  
 377 where individuals and subunits constantly negotiated change. The findings were influenced by the  
 378 longitudinal data, where we followed the changes as a series of successive events. A field note  
 379 suggested: 'culture moves with events' (Field Notes, January 2019), which summarises a key finding  
 380 regarding how all individuals and subunits in the sport were entangled and that power relations were  
 381 at play in all situations. is an empirical model of the change of culture process, focusing on the key  
 382 features of power relations. The following sections first outline the core concept of power relations  
 383 and later shows how distinct types of power were entangled throughout the change process.



**385 Core Concept: Power Relations**

386 Our understanding of power was developed from the empirical data and represent an  
387 interdependent capacity to regulate the successive outcomes of the change process. The findings  
388 suggested that power relations were not a possession of an individual. Instead, power existed  
389 embedded in social relationships. The overlapping circles (see Figure 2) denote how power  
390 relations happened across stages of culture with no clear boundary between stages. The stages in  
391 Figure 2 represent the key features of power relations during the current stage. Going from one  
392 stage to the next thus represents a significant shift in the features of the power relations.

393 **Systemic power.** Systemic power denoted the perception of an organisation, group, or  
394 individual's right to create conditions, which might require adaptive changes. It was often  
395 formalised through targets from UK Sport or Sport England (e.g., number of top three placements  
396 in international competitions); policies (e.g., selection for youth national team policy); regulations  
397 (e.g., rules to enforce safeguarding); and organisational charts (e.g., an individual's formal position  
398 in a hierarchy, for example, a Performance Director or Chief Executive Officer). Systemic power  
399 relied on these formalised structures and perceived legitimacy to act as a general system of control  
400 and formal authority. For individuals, the systemic nature of an individual's right to create  
401 conditions for change for often related to their place in the organisation. We found three subtypes  
402 of systemic power: (1) reward power, (2) coercive power, and (3) expert power. On the one hand,  
403 rewards and expert power enabled NGB-1 and other NGBs to run talent and elite sports initiatives.  
404 In contrast, some of the features of systemic power were perceived as constraining change efforts  
405 and creating inertia:

406 But we are taking one step forward while we're on one of those things at the  
407 airport. You know. The moving walkways. And we're walking that way. But the  
408 moving walkway is actually going the opposite way to us. Slowly. (TT2)

409           **Reward power.** Reward power represents the perceived ability of to reward an organisation  
410 with resources (e.g. funding, time, power by association). This was explained by a Sport England  
411 participant: 'We would like to see that the collaboration with us provides governing bodies with a set  
412 of armour to justify their changes' (Sport England participant). The conditions from 2008 until  
413 December 2016 were characterised by funding and political will. The support was found to influence  
414 all participating NGBs and led to UK Sport and Sport England rewarding NGBs with funding. One  
415 participant from NGB-B explained: 'the political will that is behind that finance has been incredibly  
416 supportive for sports' (NGB-B).

417           **Coercive power.** Coercive power represented the perceived ability of an organisation to  
418 threaten punishment (e.g. removing funding or access to experts). Reward power was often connected  
419 to coercive power since funding from UK Sport, and Sport England often came with formalised  
420 targets (e.g. ranking at the Olympic Games, the number of athletes on the talent pathway). The  
421 coercive nature of the systemic power relations was that NGB-1 felt compelled to oblige with the  
422 targets set by UK Sport prior to the 2016 Olympic Games and by Sport England during the time we  
423 carried out the study. Coaches in the sport explained that NGB-1 had followed the targets set out from  
424 UK Sport and focused on a subset of the events in the sport. Yet, having a narrow focus was perceived  
425 to harm other events in the sport:

426           There has been a regime up until now. I don't know what the idea behind it was. I  
427           remember speaking to someone saying if the goal was to destroy [an event], you  
428           could not have done a better job (C1)

429           **Expert power.** The expert power denoted the perception of an organisation's or a person's  
430 expert knowledge within a salient area of interest. To athletes, this included support services from  
431 the EIS and UK Coaching: '[NGB-1] wasn't really involved during this time. It was rather the  
432 English Institute of Sport and my conversations with their Performance-Lifestyle Advisor' (Field

433 Notes, April 2019).

434       **Informational power.** In contrast to systemic power, we found that informational power  
435 was relatively discrete and rarely formalised. The main feature was that informational power  
436 existed as an interdependent capacity in the relationships between individuals, subunits, and  
437 organisations. It emerged in interactions to produce and/or obstruct change. We found five  
438 subtypes of informational power: (1) referent power, (2) mobilising power, (3) expert power, (4)  
439 reward power, and (5) coercive power. All subtypes of informational power involved how  
440 individuals and groups processed information.

441       **Referent power.** Referent power referred to a level of attraction (e.g. desire to be associated  
442 with) and a feeling of oneness (e.g., perception of relatedness) with other individuals or subunits.  
443 For example, in conceptualising *mobilising power*, it became evident that individuals (e.g. coaches  
444 and athletes) and subunits created coalitions around similar interests (e.g. feeling of oneness).  
445 Parents of athletes also explained that there was a desire to be associated with certain coaches. The  
446 reason was parents' and athletes' idiosyncratic views of what a high-level coach was (e.g. gender,  
447 nationality). The exchange below exemplifies differences in how parents attribute referent power  
448 to a coach:

449       Parent 1: Don't ask [my son], he is really unhappy. He is not liking it. It doesn't fit  
450 him, the style of coaching from, I don't know what the coach is called.

451       Parent 2: Whereas if you ask [my daughter], she would say it's fantastic. "Mum,  
452 mum, can he coach me when we come again, I want some lessons from him" (P2)

453       **Mobilising power.** Coalitions of enhancing individuals and subunits established through  
454 mobilising networks might provide a source of power to all the involved. We found that cultivating  
455 such alliances influenced the change process since it was a way to develop an informal organisation  
456 to either support or counter the proposed changes. An example of how individuals mobilised

457 against the Talent Team's proposed updates to the policy for selecting youth national teams  
458 involved external actors mobilising a coalition of stakeholders (i.e. parents of athletes, volunteer  
459 selectors, and coaches) to stop the implementation. Several stakeholders experienced a loss of  
460 social position (e.g. resources, place in hierarchy) and mobilised around a similar interest in  
461 stopping the changes.

462 **Expert power.** Informational expert power was similar to systemic expert power, albeit  
463 not formalised. An example was the principal researcher's role in NGB-1. The findings and  
464 collaboration with the Talent Team afforded the principal researcher with considerable influence  
465 to suggest avenues for change, as exemplified by this excerpt from the field notes:

466 'It turns out that I [principle researcher] now have a significant role in the Talent  
467 Team. ... Next year's season plan was based on my recommendations, and I seem  
468 to have the power to direct the avenues [NGB-1] should follow. It also seems like  
469 I have more influence with some coaches than the Talent Manager. (Field Notes,  
470 March 2018)

471 Furthermore, when asking individuals and subunits about their perception of the principal  
472 researcher's role, they often explained that the Talent Team referred to the research to increase the  
473 legitimacy of their work.

474 **Reward power.** In contrast to systemic reward power, informational reward power existed  
475 at a personal level. The excerpt below illustrates how the Talent Team lacked the financial support  
476 to reward athletes and instead had to appeal to others' perception of their ability to reward them  
477 with influence and the hope of developing:

478 Before we would impose. Say, right, this is a training programme. Come. Do it  
479 here at these times, and we will give you some money. We have no carrot to say  
480 come and do this. We don't really have stick either. All we have is, actually, if we

481 do this together, we will all get better, and it is a little bit of carrot, but it's not an  
482 easy financial carrot. (Field Notes, May 2018)

483 **Coercive power.** Coercive power denotes abusing power relationships at a personal level  
484 to force other individuals (e.g. athletes or coaches) or subunits to assert or amplify their social  
485 status. Individuals engaged in coercive power relations through manipulation or other destructive  
486 behaviours, as described in this excerpt from the field notes:

487 A [Coach] recently berated [NGB-1 employee] so much that he [NGB-1  
488 employee] had to take two weeks off. Another NGB employee explained that the  
489 [coach] had shouted at him and acted physically threatening because of proposed  
490 changes to the calendar for the forthcoming season. (Excerpt from Field Notes,  
491 May 2018)

#### 492 **Entanglement of Power Relations During a Change of Culture Process**

493 The following provides examples of the entanglement of power relations during the change  
494 process.

495 **Preconditions.** The preconditions refer to the prevailing context (e.g., changes, conflict,  
496 culture) prior to the study. NGB-1 had a long history of a lack of credibility due to vocal critique  
497 from athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders within the sport (Figure 2). Conflicts between NGB-  
498 1 and athletes had previously led to legal cases contesting NGB-1's selections for major  
499 international tournaments, athletes changing nationality, and the failings of two past short-lived  
500 (Sixteen months and Fourteen months) talent development programmes. The short-lived talent  
501 programmes meant that coaches and athletes had little trust in NGB-1 and their ability to create  
502 sustainable initiatives: 'We have seen a lot of different programs come and go. ... I like what I  
503 have seen today. But if you're asking me to put my house on it? I'm pessimistic' (C1).

504           **Stage 1: Power imbalance and conflict.** The power relations during this stage were  
505 characterised by an asymmetrical power balance. The Talent Team attempted to use their formal  
506 authority through systemic power to implement a new athlete development pathway (see Figure  
507 1). Lacking reward power, the Talent Team also tried to mobilise a coalition of supportive coaches  
508 to support the implementation. However, conflict arose between the Talent Team and many newly  
509 contracted coaches. We found that the conflict was because of a divergence of interest. Here,  
510 coaches argued that the new members in the Talent Team lacked understanding of the sport:

511           He [Talent Team member] says his job is to challenge me just to feel that I'm not  
512 like a dictator and I can do whatever I want. ... This is a guy who's a total idiot,  
513 and I don't want to be part of this. (Counter Power Broker)

514           The divergence of interest showed that the Talent Team lacked referent power with the  
515 newly contracted coaches (i.e. a feeling of oneness). Reflecting on this, the Talent Team attributed  
516 their lack of history as a part of the sport as a key issue:

517           'So we went through a lot of different coaches and working with a lot of different  
518 people, which is always challenging. Because we didn't have the history and  
519 people would say "What, you don't [do the sport]? That's the worst thing ever"  
520 (TT2).

521           **Stage 2: Antagonistic power relations.** The conflict from stage 1 carried over into the  
522 following stage and became explicit and overt. Some coaches and community leaders overtly  
523 challenged the formal authority of the Talent Team. One example was how the head of a training  
524 centre used his own systemic reward and coercive power to control scarce resources—in this case,  
525 access to training facilities:

526           We had booked on for all these camps here at the centre, and in effect, he goes  
527 through and just takes days out here and there. He just takes out [days] in the



528 middle for no other reason than killing the whole programme. (Field Notes,  
529 November 2017)

530 The background underpinning the head of the training centre's ability to control the access  
531 to training facilities was that the WCP at NGB-1 had invested some of the previous UK Sport  
532 funding in a prepayment for access. The prepayment tied the new athlete development programme  
533 to the training centre and put the head of the centre in a position of systemic power.

534 *Conflict in the organisational structure.* During this stage, we also found that some  
535 coaches used their personal alliances and referent power to challenge the Talent Teams systemic  
536 power by influencing the management in NGB-1. Countering the systemic power created a conflict  
537 between the management and the Talent Team. The coaches emphasised that old conflicts between  
538 the WCP and NGB-1 were carried forward by the new Talent Team. One individual in NGB-1  
539 management reflected on this conflict after the end of the study:

540 Some governing bodies solely exist for the purpose of the World-Class  
541 programme. But that is not our organisation. The old World-Class programme had  
542 a sense of entitlement to them, and it seems like they brought the worst of their  
543 personalities into the sport. When it closed, and we hired the [Talent Team], I told  
544 [individual] that 'it will take years before this entitlement isn't part of [our sport]'.  
545 (Field Notes, March 2019)

545 (Field Notes, March 2019)

546 As shown by the excerpt, NGB-1 personnel understood that conflict was partly due to a  
547 perception of the Talent Team's misguided entitlement. NGB personnel explained that the  
548 entitlement was because of the Talent Team wanting to dictate the direction of culture change. One  
549 NGB-1 employee explained: 'Why would I help [the Talent Team member] when they don't help  
550 me?' (Field Notes, March 2018).

551 The Talent Team's relationship with the Board and Management remained as a critical  
552 regulator in this conflict and was in constant fragile flux. A member of the Talent Team described  
553 the friction: 'I feel like [Management] is trying to catch me out and set me up' (Field Notes, March  
554 2018). The conflict influenced the organisational structure and limited the Talent Team's systemic  
555 power to implement initiatives for a change of culture.

556 **Stage 3: Codetermination to solve conflicts.** The Talent Team recognised the importance  
557 of building a coalition with stakeholders to successfully implement change initiatives. The Team  
558 also recognised the importance of regaining their position in the organisational structure and limit  
559 the systemic power of counter-subunits and individuals (e.g. the head of the training centre).

560 ***Mobilising a coalition.*** Mobilising a coalition of individuals and subunits that supported  
561 the change initiatives involved decentralising the athlete development pathway by establishing  
562 GBR Development Centres around England. The coalition was built on codetermination of  
563 stakeholders including athletes' parents who emphasised dual-career opportunities; universities to  
564 create an alliance that afforded legitimacy to the Talent Team, and 'forward-thinking coaches.' We  
565 also found that building this coalition showed how a dominant subunit (i.e. the Talent Team)  
566 amplified their informational power by partnering with enhancing subunits. In contrast, counter  
567 subunits viewed the new coalition as a regime akin to the previous WCP:

568 It doesn't matter what's better. Everyone is going to say, or most of them, that it's  
569 perfect. Because these people didn't have a chance before to get close to the  
570 federation and now, they can't see anything else. It's like a regime that they run!

571 (Counter Power Broker)

572 Building the coalition and decentralising the athlete development programme also meant  
573 that the Talent Team was less reliant on the training centre that had previously controlled the access  
574 to training facilities. Being less reliant on this centre meant that the head of the centre was more

575 replaceable and held less systemic power because the Talent Team had spread the control over  
576 access to training facilities to their supportive coalition.

577 The Talent Team explained that some individuals were impossible to integrate into the  
578 programme, which made it necessary to consider the replaceability of certain individuals. The  
579 reason was that their repeated transgressions and engagement in counter behaviours were  
580 perceived to come with substantial psychological and resource costs to NGB-1:

581 That's that lack of clarity of purpose, and also the poor behaviour of the coach, to  
582 be perfectly honest. They're no longer in the group because that was creating a  
583 drag on a system because you're trying to get people aligned (TT2)

#### 584 **Towards A Working Model for Examining Change of Culture Processes**

585 The findings of the current study and previous articles from the same study (cf. Feddersen,  
586 Morris, Abrahamsen, et al., 2020; Feddersen, Morris, Littlewood, et al., 2020) structured the  
587 findings in empirical models based on the integration of AR and GT (cf. Dick, 2007). The main  
588 function of these models was to translate the findings into a manageable model to provide an  
589 overview of the stages of a change of culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Feddersen, Morris,  
590 Littlewood, and Richardson (2020) focused on the stages of a change of culture and the  
591 organisational outcome, the second study showed how the macroculture influenced organisations  
592 in British Olympic sports, and the current study focused on the power relations. The findings in  
593 both studies show that the empirical model can be modified to fit the specific purpose and focus.

594 Special consideration was paid to the possible modifiability of the model to make it open  
595 to extension as a result of future research (cf. Weed, 2017). In the current paper, we have used  
596 terminology from the wider literature (e.g. Foucault, 1979; French & Raven, 1959) to make it more  
597 widely applicable. All types of power relations were developed from the ground up. Yet, we found  
598 it helpful to link our findings to the wider literature. We suggest that the empirical model might be

599 suitable for the study of culture change in sport. It can be modified to fit other contexts (i.e. the  
600 structural conditions) and help researchers deal with the large amounts of data expected during a  
601 longitudinal study (i.e., it helps group data into preconditions and change of culture stages).

## 602 **Discussion**

603 The study contributes to the field of organisational culture in sport by examining the power  
604 relations that regulate change. Longitudinal designs are often recommended, particularly in  
605 relation to studying change, but are rarely used given the time commitment from both the  
606 researchers and participants. We found that the power relations within the organisation were  
607 influenced by outside structural conditions (e.g. norms, policy, and funding), thus extending the  
608 findings to sports governance. The current study could, therefore, be relevant to both sports  
609 managers and sport psychologists. Systemic (e.g. policy, funding, formal authority) and  
610 Informational Power (e.g. expertise, coercion, reward) regulated the change of culture.  
611 Organisational practitioners (e.g. talent managers, performance directors) can use these findings  
612 to inform how they implement cultural change in sports. Understanding the systemic and  
613 informational power relations within an elite sports organisation could help organisational  
614 practitioners navigate challenges and conflict. The study is also an argument for practitioners to  
615 understand a given site beyond its people before or as a part of an intervention.

### 616 **Power Relations as the Key Social Process in a Change of Culture**

617 The findings in the present study support Alvesson (2017) and Helin et al. 's (2014)  
618 suggestion that power might be a critical social process that occurs during organisational change.  
619 The articles from this study indicate that power might be ever-present behind the scenes where it  
620 manifested in conflicts and power plays (Feddersen, Morris, Littlewood, et al., 2020). Morgan  
621 (2006b) suggests that the path an organisation might take usually hinges on power relations  
622 between the actors involved. Likewise, Cruickshank, Collins, and Minten (2014) argue that power

623 could have a critical role in driving culture change. Our findings support an understanding of power  
624 as a social relation. Foucault (1979) uses the image of a capillary network to explain how power  
625 reaches from one individual to another. Here, power circulates throughout an organisation  
626 (Hargreaves, 1986). However, we also found that the scope of power was influenced by legitimacy,  
627 which allowed us to subdivide power relations into systemic and informational power.

628 First, the current study extends Feddersen et al., (2020) by examining how systemic power  
629 influenced the change process in NGB-1. Exercising systemic power might include the authority  
630 to mandate change and determine appropriate avenues for change (cf. Dowling et al., 2018). In the  
631 current study, we found that the systemic features (i.e. policies, regulations, formal hierarchies  
632 available through organisational documents) gave the Talent Team a higher degree of legitimacy.  
633 Morgan (2006b) argues that legitimacy stabilises power relations. Stable power might allow  
634 individuals or organisations a 'right to rule' (Morgan, 2006b) or decision-making power (Parent,  
635 Naraine, & Hoye, 2018) if the systemic features are acknowledged by others.

636 Systemic power might, therefore, be used to direct change agendas as an instrument of  
637 domination (Morgan, 2006a). Scraton (2016) suggests that formalised systemic power can act as  
638 an instrument of suppression and strip organisations and individuals of influence and rights. In  
639 sport, an absolute feature of the systemic funding relationship in British sports is suggested by  
640 Grix and Phillpots (2011): 'most National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) are hidebound to  
641 their paymasters' (p. 9). We also found that UK Sport and Sport England influenced the studied  
642 sport at several points by dictating appropriate avenues for change. The interorganisational  
643 connection between NGBs on one side and Sport England and UK Sport on the other is what Frisby  
644 (2005) calls an entrenched power relationship. Here, it is critical that NGBs can trust those in  
645 positions of power.

646           However, we also found that some individuals in the sport had little trust in UK Sport and  
647 Sport England due to the perceived severe funding cuts. A fallout of the mistrust was that some  
648 violated norms and regulations because they perceived it to be in their interest to do so (e.g. to  
649 have their athletes selected for youth national teams, win youth medals) to keep receiving funding.  
650 Mitchell, Crosset, and Barr (1999) argue that some may violate rules because it is in their short-  
651 term interest. Sports managers need to consider strategies for encouraging behaviours that support  
652 the agreed-on policies. The influence of UK Sport and Sport England can be viewed through  
653 Morgan's (2006a) instrument of domination metaphor. Based on our findings and those of Babiak,  
654 Thibault, and Willem (2018), we suggest that future research could benefit from examining the  
655 changing interorganisational relationships. One avenue to do so could be to examine mechanisms  
656 of power plays (Morgan, 2006b) or power imbalances (Babiak et al., 2018) between NGBs and  
657 organisations such as UK Sport.

658           Second, informational power existed as a tacit capacity, which was negotiated in the  
659 relationships among individuals and groups. We found five subtypes of informational power: (1)  
660 reward, (2) coercive, (3) expert, (4) mobilising, and (5) referent power. These different subtypes  
661 often manifested in conjunction with other subtypes. Feddersen et al., (2020) introduced how  
662 informational power might underpin antagonist behaviours to counter proposed changes. In the  
663 current study, we probe the power relations of counter subunits and found of individuals created  
664 coalitions through mobilising power in conjunction with coercive to counter the systemic power  
665 of the NGB. Morgan (2006b) argues that mobilising or initiating coalitions among 'less powerful  
666 actors' can serve as an instrument to oppose instruments of domination. Creating coalitions through  
667 mobilising power could allow counter subunits to delegitimise systemic change agendas by waging  
668 conflict (Foucault, 2001).

669 In line with Morgan (2006b), we also found that one source of power was how both NGB-  
670 1 and individuals in the sport persuaded others to support them and their interests. Arnold, Fletcher,  
671 and Hobson (2018) found that so-called 'dark leaders' drew their power off people through  
672 manipulation. Our findings supported findings of how both coercive and reward power could be  
673 used to create networks of subservient followers. Both Foucault (1979) and Scraton (2016) suggest  
674 that persuading others in such a way can lead to authoritarian leadership of subordinates. Given  
675 these findings, research is needed into how some individual might leverage their power to create  
676 subservient followers and what the psychological impact of this may be.

677 Nevertheless, we also found examples of what Morgan (2006b) calls democratic practices.  
678 Decentralising the sport from London engaged subunits in participation with NGB-1, which  
679 allowed subunits to have more balanced power relations. NGB-1 sought to share less important  
680 aspects of the daily work with the community by decentralising some official activities. These  
681 examples support Alvesson and Svenningsson's (2008) suggestion that power facilitates changes  
682 in organisational culture.

683 The findings of the present study suggested that the power relations were characterised by  
684 conflict when different interests collided. On one side, we found that the NGB sought to use their  
685 systemic power to dictate changes. However, they were met by mobilising groups of individuals  
686 seeking to delegitimise their formal authority. Morgan (2006a) argues that conflict is ever-present  
687 in organisational life and that they may arise if a dominant group seeks to further their own self-  
688 interest. Likewise, Gibson and Groom (2018) argue that conflict might arise when contradictory  
689 beliefs collide. The NGB, in this study, was described as a 'regime' as the conflict grew. The reason  
690 given was that some individuals in the sport perceived the NGB as trying to dominate others to  
691 pursue selfish interests. Morgan (2011) suggests that domination can lead to power imbalances  
692 and images of exploited groups. An example of the dark side of power imbalances in sport is

693 described by Mountjoy (2019), who argues that it can lead to a sports culture that commodifies  
694 athletes. Further, the accounts of unacceptable behaviours in British sports (Grey-Thompson,  
695 2017) also cited the influence of exploitative relationships as a critical influence leading to  
696 bullying.

### 697 **Applied Implications**

698 Organisations wanting to drive and implement a change of culture should be aware of the  
699 dynamic relationship between systemic and informational power. Our findings suggested that  
700 systemic power might not be enough to drive change. Instead, gaining 'sufficient power' could be  
701 related to mobilising capacity for action (see Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Skille & Chroni, 2018;  
702 Steen-Johnsen & Hanstad, 2008). Amis, Slack, and Hinings (2004) suggest that the relationship  
703 between power relations and capacity for action involves protecting or realising interests or  
704 particular values. The influence of capacity could, therefore, be how individuals or subunit  
705 mobilise others to support the change agenda (Steen-Johnsen & Hanstad, 2008).

706 Sports researchers have identified 'cultural architects' who might be influential in shaping  
707 a culture (cf. Cruickshank et al., 2014; Eubank, Nesti, & Cruickshank, 2014). Similarly, research  
708 in global economic orders (cf. Larsen & Ellersgaard, 2017; Subacchi, 2008) describes the influence  
709 of 'power brokers', and how they might be individuals who can engage others through power  
710 relations. Identifying power brokers using the subtypes of informational power could, therefore,  
711 be critical for sports managers because it might help identify the individuals who can engage others  
712 to shape a culture.

### 713 **Strengths and Limitations**

714 The strengths of the present study are that it expands on previous organisational culture  
715 research by studying change along the way. A novel methodological influence of the current study  
716 was that it both collected data longitudinally and analysed the data longitudinally. Doing so gives



717 us real-time insights into how power relations were at the centre of change in an Olympic sport.  
718 The limitations of this study could be in connection with the threats of AR (cf. Kock, 2004):  
719 uncontrollability, contingency, and subjectivity. The contingency threat means that the body of  
720 data can become broad and shallow, like in research where the researcher retains all control (Kock,  
721 2004). In the current study, we compensated for the threats of AR by employing 'the Grounded  
722 Theory Antidote' (Kock, 2004, p. 270). We took the necessary steps to introduce GT coding into  
723 the reconnaissance and each action cycle. Using GT in this study allowed us to probe deeper into  
724 the data to uncover how power and conflict influenced the process. Some may also argue that  
725 uncontrollability is a limitation of the current study. However, in adopting a participative  
726 epistemology (Heron & Reason, 2006), we had to honour the inputs from the participants beyond  
727 merely delivering data. The key to rigour in this study is thus that we employed all methodological  
728 elements in a coherent way vis-à-vis the epistemology.

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