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#PsychMapping Exercise: Streamlining Client Intake and Progress Monitoring Across Diverse Profiles

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ABSTRACT

Conducting an initial analysis of clients and tracking their progress are critical components of effective applied sport and exercise psychology. This project investigates the #PsychMapping exercise in practice, focusing on its integration into applied scenarios. The exercise, characterized by an integrative perspective and holistic self-reflection, delineates personal descriptors, self-regulation, and external factors. Employed across four distinct client profiles, the exercise is shown to be a valuable tool for both intake sessions and monitoring intervention efficacy. The report explores changes in summary maps, clients' experiences, and practitioner insights, highlighting the adaptability and benefits of the exercise for clients and practitioners alike.

KEYWORDS


Coaching; consultation;
self-exploration;
self-knowledge;
self-reflection

The question, 'How can I help you?' often represents a primary concern for applied practitioners in Sport and Exercise Psychology (SEP) at the onset of a new client collaboration. This is frequently followed by the introspective query, 'Have I been able to help?' Such uncertainties, as emphasized by even more experienced practitioners, are a continual aspect of service delivery (Wadsworth et al., 2024). Within this context, #PsychMapping provides a comprehensive model for understanding behavior, incorporating a self-reflection exercise for client assessment and progress monitoring, and demonstrates flexibility applicable to a wide range of stakeholders, including athletes, exercisers, coaches, and referees.

#PsychMapping

#PsychMapping constitutes a nascent movement within the field of SEP, emerging as a global initiative with a significant international footprint. This collaborative effort unites over 70 practitioners from more than 25 countries across diverse continents (#PsychMapping, n.d.). The central

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ethos of #PsychMapping is the development of an integrative perspective, which seeks to elucidate the complexities of human behavior in sport and exercise environments. A pivotal aspect of this movement is the refinement of a self-reflection task, anchored in the aforementioned integrative framework. This task serves a dual purpose: firstly, as an evaluative tool facilitating an in-depth exploration of clients' individual circumstances and requirements; secondly, as a mechanism for the longitudinal tracking of behavioral and psychological changes.

The #PsychMapping perspective

The #PsychMapping perspective systematically categorizes individual experiences, dividing them into personal descriptors, self-regulation attributes, and external influences. A detailed explanation of this framework is available in Latinjak and Hatzigeorgiadis (2021). Regarding the first cluster, *Personal Descriptors* are a central component of the #PsychMapping perspective as they focus on the individual, their more stable characteristics that define who they are, and their more variable states that describe them in specific situations. Hence, personal descriptors encompass a range of stable traits, including:

- Physical Attributes: For example, weight and height.
- Psychological Dimensions: Such as personality traits and specific sport goals.
- Social Elements: Including aspects like leadership style and internalized cultural norms.
- Memory-Related Components: Past experiences and technical sport skills, for instance.
- Habits: Routine behaviors, such as automated sleeping or eating patterns.

Additionally, *Personal Descriptors* cover more dynamic states, such as:

- Physiological States: Examples include hormonal responses and brain activation patterns.
- Psychological States: For example, emotions, task engagement, and thought processes.
- Social Experiences: Feelings of envy or being judged, for instance.
- Pre-Behavioral States: Including decision-making processes.

Furthermore, people do not exist in isolation, as they are part of a physical and social environment that exerts a diversity of influences on them and which they influence through their actions, behavior, and

performance. Therefore, the second large cluster in the #PsychMapping perspective is *External Factors*, which include:

- Physical Factors: Such as weather conditions and infrastructure.
- Social Factors: Sports clubs and media exposure, for example.
- Interpersonal Factors: Including relationships with coaches and peers.
- Circumstantial Factors: Examples include training exercises and league standings.
- Broader Life Contexts: Environments like school, sports, and family.

Sometimes, people experience harmony with their environment, characterized by an equilibrium between external demands and internal resources, giving rise to states like flow. Yet, frequently challenges arise, especially between external demands and internal dispositions, like when a task demands more physical effort than a person has the energy to muster, or when a game requires more precision than a person is prepared to display under the effects of muscle tension caused by stress. In such moments, people resort to self-regulation, the third large cluster in the #PsychMapping perspective. *Self-Regulation* is conceived as a process that includes:

- Coping Strategy Selection: Choosing strategies like change-oriented or avoidance-oriented coping.
- Utilization of Psychological Skills: Employing skills such as imagery, self-talk, and emotion control.

The #PsychMapping model emphasizes the reciprocal influence between external factors and personal descriptors. It highlights the controlled modulation of personal descriptors through self-regulation, offering a nuanced understanding within the SEP framework.

The #PsychMapping exercise

The #PsychMapping exercise, developed by Latinjak et al. (2021), provides a structured approach for individuals, typically with the guidance of a SEP practitioner, to engage in a self-reflective exercise. This exercise encompasses examining external factors, personal descriptors, and self-regulatory strategies pertinent to a particular subject. Notably, the exercise offers a high degree of adaptability, empowering clients to focus on overarching themes such as overall performance, or delve into more targeted issues, such as managing pre-performance anxiety. For instance, the #PsychMapping exercise can be beneficial for individuals grappling with low self-esteem, performance anxiety, or difficulty in maintaining healthy exercise routines. In collaboration with a practitioner, they can

undertake a detailed exploration of various dimensions that contribute to their low self-esteem, performance anxiety, or lack of exercise engagement. This includes identifying and analyzing relevant external factors, personal descriptors, and self-regulation strategies. By focusing on these elements, the #PsychMapping exercise aids in understanding both the root causes and the impacts of low self-esteem, performance anxiety, or lack of exercise engagement. This comprehensive approach of examining a wide range of factors affecting a topic not only helps pinpoint specific areas of concern but also aids in selecting targeted strategies for improvement.

Comprising 13 question cards and a culminating summary map, the exercise unfolds dynamically during a consultancy session. Clients respond to the questions corresponding to their chosen topic, while the practitioner concurrently synthesizes these responses into concise entries on the summary map. Clients reflect on physical environment, organisational/cultural factors, social factors, interpersonal factors, tasks and competitive factors, physical characteristics, psychological traits, psychological states, differential traits, strong mental skills, weak mental skills, and dysfunctional coping strategies. Two open questions during the exercise further prompt the client to review previous answers and add any external factors or personal descriptors that are missing. For an in-depth examination of question cards, refer to Latinjak et al. (2021).

The client then employs a green-to-red color code, signifying the spectrum from very helpful to very problematic aspects, to shade the map. Upon completion, clients take the personalized summary map home, fostering ongoing reflection, while the practitioner retains a copy for reference. [Supplementary Table 1](#) presents a detailed guide to the #PsychMapping exercise, covering material adaptation, session setup, topic selection, question formulation, and map entry. [Figure 1](#) illustrates a sample card and the empty summary map. These resources are meant to facilitate integration of the #PsychMapping exercise into practical sessions, enhancing its application in SEP.

The #PsychMapping exercise finds application in both intake sessions and monitoring the efficacy of applied practice. While practitioners employ various methods, such as observations and questionnaires, for understanding individuals, the #PsychMapping exercise specifically aligns with an exploratory interview approach (similar to the Performance Interview, Aoyagi et al., 2017). Its distinct features include its holistic coverage of topics relevant to diverse stakeholders in sport and exercise contexts, unlike the specialized interview guides crafted specifically for use with athletes. Additionally, the exercise results in a visual summary map for clients to take home, differing from conventional interviews that typically yield




Date: / / 20		Type of session: The #PsychMapping Exercise			
Psychologist: _____		Exercise topic: _____			10
Participant: _____					External factors
External variables		Personal descriptors (traits, states & behaviour/ performance)		Self-regulation (strategies and skills)	Identify other activities, commitments or life events that you think are most relevant to exploring today's topic.
					
					You could mention participating in social media, watching online sports content, school or university, family activities, work commitments, travel, religious or cultural activities, gaming, meeting friends, weddings, funerals, other people's illnesses, moving house ...
Very problematic – rather problematic – equally helpful as problematic – rather helpful – definitely helpful				Important – Regular	Follow us on Twitter @PsychMapping Find out more about us www.psychmapping.com

Figure 1. An illustrative example of the empty #PsychMapping exercise summary map and a question card.

written or oral summaries. In essence, the #PsychMapping exercise offers a unique and visualized approach to understanding and engaging individuals within SEP.

Practitioners are also tasked with the ongoing evaluation of treatments and interventions in applied practice (Wadsworth et al., 2024). Utilizing preintervention and postintervention measures enables practitioners to critically assess the effectiveness of their interventions and demonstrate clients' developmental progress over time. The #PsychMapping exercise could prove to be a valuable tool for monitoring progress, offering two distinct advantages. Firstly, it comprehensively captures the development of specific topics that clients themselves identify as relevant, providing a nuanced understanding of their progress. Secondly, the exercise consistently unveils new challenges with each application, serving as a continuous post-test for past interventions and a pretest for future work.

Aims

This project aimed to evaluate the efficacy of the #PsychMapping exercise in pre and post-intervention scenarios across four distinct client profiles. The primary objective is to illustrate changes in summary maps between pre- and post-tests, showcasing the exercise's effectiveness in monitoring client development over time. Additionally, the report describes clients' impressions of the #PsychMapping exercise, providing insights into their experiences with the tool. Similarly, the practitioner's perspective is examined to offer valuable insights into the delivery and implementation of the #PsychMapping exercise. By examining the views of clients and practitioners, the report aims to provide a complete understanding of both groups' experiences and insights regarding the usefulness of the exercise

in applied practice within SEP. Overall, the report illustrates the application of #PsychMapping in a real-world setting and offers practical examples for practitioners, enabling them to integrate this innovative methodology into their own practice.

The present project

Practitioner and participants

The practitioner (second author) involved in the project was a 26-year-old male graduate in sport sciences and sport and exercise psychology, possessing one year of practical experience. Prior to the project, he undertook an 18-h asynchronous online #PsychMapping foundations course, supplementing his knowledge with theoretical and practical articles on the #PsychMapping exercise (Latinjak et al., 2021; Latinjak & Hatzigeorgiadis, 2021). Furthermore, the practitioner had applied the #PsychMapping exercise in three consultancy sessions as part of his preparation before the project commenced. Following each session, he engaged in self-reflection and critically assessed, in concert with the first author who acted as a mentor at this stage, his readiness to utilize the exercise with project participants. The mentor's role at this stage involved active listening and facilitating deeper self-reflection through probing feedback. For example, when the practitioner shared an experience, the mentor would ask for further clarification and encourage exploration of the underlying reasons for the positive or negative assessment of the experience.

The initial practice session was deemed successful from the client's viewpoint, yet the practitioner identified potential improvements, particularly in presenting examples from the question cards. Instead of reading one or two examples from the question card aloud, which could potentially bias the clients, the practitioner directed them to the example section and gave them time to explore all the examples on their own. During the second session, he refined his approach to recording information on the summary map. For example, the practitioner always asked clients for their agreement when using a more scientific concept instead of their vague terminology, and he also began to use the clients' everyday terms instead of more scientific language to facilitate clients to identify with the summary map. By the third session, the process was seamless, affirming his readiness to commence the project.

The sample included four distinct client profiles: Participant 1 was an elite male tennis player (age 18–25) who, at the time of the project, held a prominent position within the top 10 rankings in Greece. Participant 2 was a female recreational triathlete (age 18–25) engaged in swimming, cycling, running, and strength training four times a week. Participant 3 was a male soccer referee (age 30–35) who, at the time of the project,

served as a referee in the third division of Greek male football. Participant 4 was a male tennis coach (age 55–60) who dedicated five days a week to coaching and possessed extensive coaching experience spanning 30 years. All participants, who were of Greek nationality, willingly provided informed consent before the initiation of the first session. They were explicitly informed about their right to withdraw from the project at any point, underscoring the principles of voluntary participation and ethical considerations in research practice.

The project protocols

The present project was approved by the second author's university ethics board and adhered to the International Declaration of Helsinki guidelines. Participants, having expressed a natural interest in psychological support to the practitioner, were informed about the project protocol and their right to withdraw at any point while continuing their engagement with the practitioner. In their initial session, all participants completed the #PsychMapping exercise. Subsequently, they underwent three to four intervention sessions featuring an educational self-talk intervention (Latinjak et al., 2023) before revisiting the #PsychMapping exercise. All sessions conducted with the participants mirrored those in the practitioner's regular practice, as would be experienced by paying clients. For example, to start the session emerging issues since the last meeting were discussed, and participants were presented with a choice to complete the #PsychMapping exercise. Although none did, they could have chosen to discuss any other matter that was more important to them than the exercise. The sole addition for research purposes was a brief discussion to elicit participants' experiences with the #PsychMapping exercise. While the practitioner would ask clients for their feedback about interventions, in real practice this would be more casual and informal. In the context of this project, the discussion was guided by a brief interview script and responses were recorded for posterior analysis.

At the beginning of the session following the second #PsychMapping exercise, the practitioner requested permission from the participants for a post-intervention discussion. After obtaining their consent, he stressed the importance of critical feedback in the ongoing development and improvement of the exercise. The discussion then focused on the participants' experiences, openly addressing both the positive and negative aspects related to the procedures and overall impact of the exercise. Additionally, the practitioner maintained a diary, providing commentary on each #PsychMapping session, capturing both his experiences and impressions of the participants. In this project, the practitioner embraced a formative research approach (Bentley et al., 2014). This philosophy is centered on collecting data that

is instrumental in developing and refining intervention programs. As such, the primary focus was not on summative research, which typically aims to evaluate the effectiveness or overall impact of an intervention. In the context of the #PsychMapping exercise, the practitioner's objective was to gather insights for its ongoing improvement rather than to assess its final efficacy.

Outcomes

Comparing maps

For the analysis of the summary maps from the #PsychMapping exercises, each map was examined individually and then in comparison. The initial session's map was first analyzed independently to understand its implications for future sessions. Subsequently, to identify developmental changes and insights, we compared this map with the one from the second session, positioned above it in a single figure for ease of comparison. Finally, the insights derived from the second map were used to formulate lessons for future consultation sessions. After these analyses, the practitioner presented his interpretations to the participant. In an open discussion, these interpretations were then either affirmed or debated by the participant, leading to a refined understanding of the findings. For instance, the practitioner might express concern about anxiety appearing in the second map, which was absent in the first. He might interpret this as a new issue. However, the participant could explain that the anxiety isn't new; they are simply more aware of it now and motivated to learn how to better manage it. This interactive process ensured that the conclusions drawn were a result of a collaborative and dynamic dialogue between the practitioner and the participants.

In the following section, we present the interpretations derived from the summary maps of two of the four participants. The goal was to highlight the informative potential of these maps, both looking at them in isolation and when comparing both maps. To illustrate these examples in detail, two cases were selected from the four for a more in-depth presentation. Discussions focus on the changes observed between the two maps, potentially reflecting the outcomes of the intervention sessions conducted between the #PsychMapping sessions. However, it is important to clarify that evaluating the intervention's impact is not the aim of this manuscript.

The elite tennis player

The durations of the first and second #PsychMapping exercises were 35 and 37 min, respectively. The tennis player selected "general performance" as the topic for both sessions. The analysis of the first map (Figure 2) revealed that, among other areas, the tennis player could work on improving his relationship with significant social influences, namely his father

and coach. Additionally, he addressed aspects related to self-belief, confidence, and the ability to focus on the next point during games. Comparing both maps suggested that the collaborative efforts between the participant and the practitioner potentially contributed to a more positive relationship with the coach, the emergence of winning thoughts in place of disengagement, and the development of confidence as an effective self-regulation skill. The second map further indicated that future sessions could be directed toward managing the impact of academic responsibilities, addressing lapses in concentration, and optimizing self-talk usage.

The football referee

The first and second #PsychMapping exercises were 42 and 40 min long, respectively. The chosen topic for the referee’s sessions was “stress during games.” Analysis of the first map (Figure 3) revealed that discussions between the participant and practitioner initially centered around the impact of perceived game importance, anxiousness, and negative thoughts. Upon comparing both maps, it appears that the consultation sessions contributed to an improved perception of the referee committee and enhanced focus on the task instead of anxious thoughts. However, based on the second map, areas that required further attention included

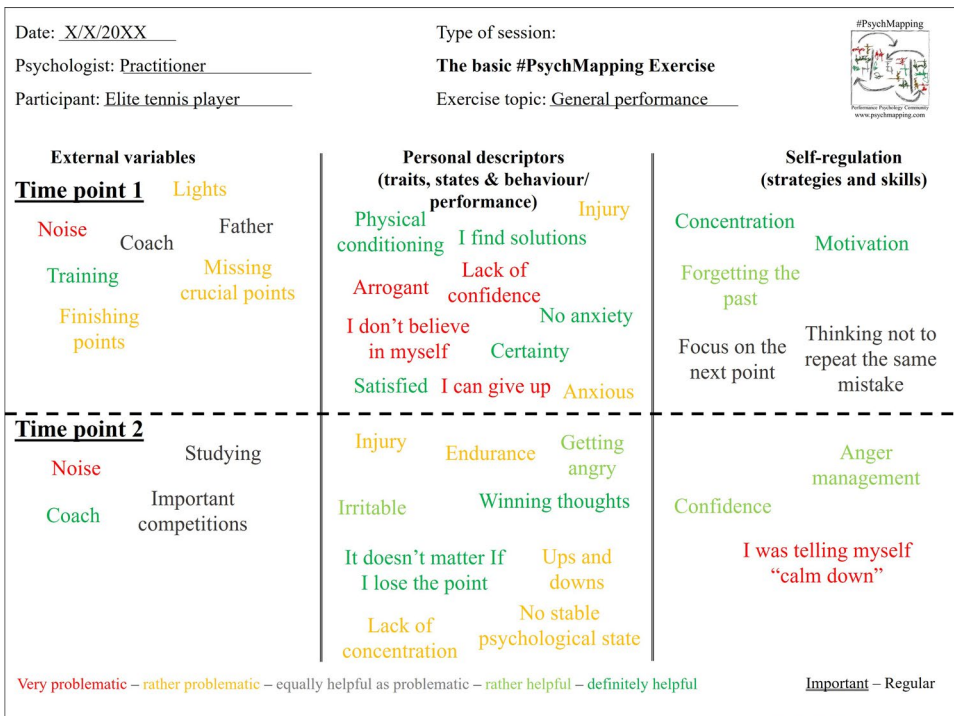


Figure 2. The first and second summary maps created by the elite tennis player.

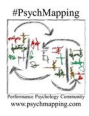
Date: <u>XX/XX/20XX</u>		Type of session:		
Psychologist: <u>Practitioner</u>		The basic #PsychMapping Exercise		
Participant: <u>Football Referee</u>		Exercise topic: <u>Stress during games</u>		
External variables		Personal descriptors (traits, states & behaviour/ performance)		Self-regulation (strategies and skills)
Time point 1				
Sold-out field	Member of referees' committee	Intelligence	Positive thinking	Concentration skills
Close friends	Woman	Sensitive	Confidence	Emotional management
Mentor	Trained	Positive energy	Agitation	Motivation skills
Match with high scoring interest	Match with low scoring interest	Fair	Alert	Thought of positive image
			Persuasiveness	Negative thoughts
				Showing of authority and integrity
Time point 2				
Bad weather	Greek referees' committee	Confidence	I don't give up easily	"Reading the game"
Lights	Football Federation	Fair		Concentration
Technology	Finances	Good physical conditioning	Focus on the goal	Sadness
Wife	Coach		Conjectures	Helping the underprivileged team
Mentor	Training			Frustration
Tactical exercises	Good performance in important matches			Body gestures
Very problematic – rather problematic – equally helpful as problematic – rather helpful – definitely helpful				Important – Regular

Figure 3. The first and second summary maps created by the football referee.

addressing biased decision-making in uncertain cases and managing negative body language associated with negative emotions.

General comments

In summary, the first map consistently encompassed relevant topics addressed in subsequent sessions, facilitating targeted interventions. The comparison between the first and second maps served as a valuable tool for monitoring participants' progress, while the second map alone directed collaboration by highlighting new topics for exploration. However, three complications arose. First, certain concepts had idiosyncratic meanings or awkward placements, resolved through the practitioner's post-session notes. Second, the consistent divergence between the first and second maps made direct comparisons challenging but aided in identifying acute and relevant issues for participants. Lastly, participants improved in creating summary maps, occasionally questioning their initial ratings and the relevance of mentioned concepts upon reflection.

Participants' experiences

During the discussions that took place after the second #PsychMapping exercise, the practitioner obtained permission from the participants to

record their comments in audio format. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim. We employed thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to examine the transcribed comments, a method chosen for its ability to uncover and interpret patterns, themes, or ideas emerging from individual experiences. Thematic analysis was particularly apt for our project as it provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives, which was essential in capturing the nuances of their experiences and viewpoints. Boyatzis' approach to thematic analysis aligns with our constructivist epistemology, which posits that reality is constructed by the research participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The underlying ontological assumption is relativism, which suggests that reality is not a single, objective entity but is instead constructed through social processes, interactions, and experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). In the subsequent paragraphs, we summarize the key experiences of the four participants, enriched with direct quotes from their discussions with the practitioner.

The elite tennis player positively rated the #PsychMapping exercises, noting improved self-understanding and ongoing progress. The exercise likely contributed to his ability to address various issues independently.

The process was helpful because I recognized what is problematic and what is not. Many of the variables have improved in the second map. It was helpful. I also enjoyed our discussions and applied many of the things we talked about. It was enjoyable. [...] After my exams, I reread the maps and tried to improve the problematic aspects myself.

The recreational triathlete gave a positive rating to the #PsychMapping exercise, particularly in the first session, citing the clarity it provided. Upon comparing both maps, she acknowledged prioritizing certain aspects more during the second exercise.

I liked that I had a picture of all those aspects. It helped me. I felt like I had a tangle in my head that unfolded during the session. [...] Especially the first session was very helpful because my problems were chaotic in my head and the map helped to make everything clearer. [...] I see that there were many things in the beginning, which bothered me ... and then, in the second map, I recognized the main problems and focused on them. Especially with regard to the external variables that are not under my control, everything was problematic for me at the beginning. For the second map, I focused on certain things.

The football referee gave a positive rating to the #PsychMapping exercise, noting its impact on his autonomic problem-solving. While comparing the two maps, he observed a substantial learning process that added complexity to the comparison.

The exercise helped me organize all these ideas in my head. [...] I liked that we gave colour and size to the words. All this helped me to make everything clearer. I understood myself better, and after creating the map, I was able to work better on the more

problematic aspects. [...] Reading the maps at home was helpful because they have contributed to my better understanding of what is important or not important in my case and in which parameters I should work more. [...] There's no relationship [between the two maps] (laughter). The first time was completely new to me. I couldn't easily distinguish what was more influential or important to me. For example, when creating the second map, I could see the size and the colours [of the entries on the map] a lot easier and quicker than on the first map.

The tennis coach valued the #PsychMapping exercise, emphasizing its role in structuring various concepts. He advocated for the repetition of the exercise as part of an ongoing learning process. Additionally, the exercise contributed to broader benefits, enhancing autonomous self-regulation.

It was very nice. I liked that all items were categorized, and the problematic variables are clear. [...] It was very helpful to see the differences between the two maps. It was good. The maps could also be made regularly. [...] By the second interview I was more familiar with the process, but we didn't change many things in the map. [...] The maps you sent me were very useful because I could see all the variables very clearly. [...] after our first sessions I did a lot of exercises for my athletes, I didn't sit idle, and I think that's why we can see some changes.

General comments

In summary, all participants consistently expressed positive views about the #PsychMapping sessions. The triathlete, referee, and coach noted that the exercise played a key role in improving their self-understanding. Furthermore, all participants appreciated its usefulness in uncovering challenges. Additionally, the triathlete and referee emphasized that the exercise assisted in discerning priorities. Participants, particularly the tennis player, referee, and coach, found ongoing engagement with the maps outside of sessions beneficial. According to the referee and coach, this continuous engagement empowered them to address challenging issues independently. Notably, both the tennis player and coach explicitly acknowledged the utility of comparing the first and second maps as a tool for gauging improvement and continuous self-discovery. Overall, the participants' experiences hinted that the #PsychMapping exercise is a positive experience which contributes to their self-knowledge, which is a foundational aspect in effective self-regulation (Valikhani et al., 2022). Hence, in addition to being beneficial when selecting interventions and monitoring the development of clients in practice, the #PsychMapping exercise itself could constitute an important learning experience.

Practitioner's self-reflection

From his initial use of the #PsychMapping exercise, during the first practice applications, the practitioner quickly found comfort in its application. Adhering to the exercise's guidelines bolstered the confidence he was still developing in his professional role. However, he recognized areas for

improvement in his delivery. To mitigate potential bias, he shifted from reading examples to clients to letting them explore these on their own. He also faced challenges in accurately categorizing concepts. For instance, when clients mentioned *concentration* in relation to personal descriptors, he was uncertain whether they were referring to the task-related focus of attention (a personal descriptor) or the ability to direct, redirect, and maintain focus of attention (falling under self-regulation). To address these challenges, he adopted a dual approach: accepting that some concepts might be incorrectly placed yet still valuable on the map, and allowing clients to choose their preferred categorization when in doubt. This approach prioritized clients' identification with the summary map over strict theoretical accuracy. After the second training session, and particularly as the project progressed, the practitioner observed a clear improvement in his familiarity and ease with the exercise's procedures. This evolution marked a transition from merely learning the procedures to finding his unique style in conducting the exercise. The insights derived from the practitioner's reflections, as outlined in this section, have played a pivotal role in shaping the recommendations for executing the #PsychMapping exercise, as detailed in [Supplementary Table 1](#). [Supplementary Table 1](#) was collaboratively developed by both authors through constructive discussions, incorporating the first author's anecdotal experience with the development and applied use of #PsychMapping over several years, and the second author's recent systematic experiences from the present study. Each author's unique knowledge—design of the #PsychMapping exercise by the first author, and insights on the actual events during the sessions by the second author—helped create an environment of mutual dependency. This balanced power dynamics and fostered constructive collaboration between the former mentor and mentee. The aim was to provide concise guidelines and suggestions for practitioners interested in incorporating the #PsychMapping exercise into their practice.

A thematic analysis, similar to that used for participant interviews, was conducted on the practitioner's diary. In this case, the first author performed the analysis, while the second author reviewed the conclusions through a member-checking process. This analysis highlighted recurring themes related to the benefits of the #PsychMapping exercise for both the participants and the practitioner, as well as its impact on session delivery. The exercise was seen as instrumental in helping participants learn about themselves, enhancing self-knowledge, especially during subsequent sessions. It facilitated participants in recognizing their challenges and understanding how the practitioner could assist in improvement. The exercise also proved beneficial for the practitioner, providing insights into participants' challenges and strengths. The detailed procedures and

pre-established materials were particularly valuable for a relatively inexperienced practitioner, instilling confidence, especially when working with an elite athlete and a more experienced coach.

In terms of session delivery, the practitioner observed increased autonomy from all four participants in the second session compared to the first. Initially, he guided them more extensively through the exercise, which was new to them. The second time participants engaged in the exercise, they seemed more familiar with the procedures and required less guidance from the practitioner. This process involved participants learning how to complete the exercise and establishing a common language. The practitioner suggested the use of scientific terms during map entries, and participants reciprocally taught sport-specific concepts. However, the practitioner advocated for using a notebook with brief explanations for potentially challenging concepts. He attached these notes to the map when archiving it. The practitioner highlighted the benefits of repeating the exercise, including enhanced self-knowledge and the discovery of new useful concepts on the second attempt. However, he also considered the possibility of recoloring the initial map during the second session to facilitate the comparison of both maps, thereby effectively monitoring the impact of the consultancy sessions. This approach would involve presenting the first session's map to the participant in the second session, but without its original coloring. The benefit of this method is that it allows for a direct comparison of each concept across the two sessions. In contrast, in the current project, only a limited number of concepts from the two separately created maps could be directly compared.

Lessons learned

For specific recommendations on utilizing the #PsychMapping exercise, informed by this project's findings, please refer to [Supplementary Table 1](#). [Supplementary Table 1](#) contains suggestions on optimizing the #PsychMapping exercise through personalized preparation of materials, strategic setup of the session space, engaging and guiding the client throughout the process, and effectively utilizing the exercise to enhance self-knowledge and psychological exploration in sports contexts. The evaluation of summary maps, participant feedback, and practitioner reflections collectively validates the effectiveness of the #PsychMapping exercise across various client profiles. This exercise is a useful method for gaining insights into clients, serving as a valid alternative to other intake interviews (e.g., Aoyagi et al., 2017). It allows practitioners to understand clients and anticipate the direction of consultancy. Entries on the map, such as problematic relationships or performance anxiety, can guide focused discussions or prompt additional assessments (e.g., anxiety scales or on-site observations). It is essential to view

the first #PsychMapping exercise as a starting point, necessitating subsequent explorations and targeted consultancy efforts rather than a standalone entity.

Based on insights from the self-reflection diary and analysis of the summary maps, the #PsychMapping exercise has been found to be particularly advantageous for inexperienced practitioners in two main areas: firstly, it enhances their confidence in conducting intake sessions, and secondly, it offers a diverse range of options for planning future sessions. For early-career practitioners, particularly when working with high-level athletes or more experienced coaches, pre-established guidelines offer a concrete plan that fosters self-belief and leads to positive outcomes. Addressing the challenge of efficiently planning a series of consultancy sessions, the summary map serves as a content list, providing immediate direction for subsequent sessions. While the #PsychMapping exercise was not specifically designed for inexperienced practitioners, its adaptable nature provides distinct advantages relevant to their career development stage (cf., Fogaça et al., 2024).

Drawing from the insights gained in this project, practitioners are advised to approach #PsychMapping sessions with a flexible mindset, allowing for durations between 35 to 75 min. It is important to be aware of and accommodate variations in session length, especially in later applications of the exercise. In the initial session, practitioners may exert more control, gradually transferring autonomy to clients as they grasp the procedures. This shift is crucial for practitioners favoring a client-led approach (for a discourse on practitioner-led procedures within client-led practices, see Tod et al., 2023). The second session of the #PsychMapping exercise emerges as a valuable learning opportunity for self-knowledge. This is underscored by participants' repeated observations that they gained a deeper understanding of themselves during the subsequent session. Amongst many reasons self-knowledge is valuable, it has been negatively related to physiological reactivity, anxiety, self-doubt, defensiveness, and narcissism (Wilson, 2009). Additionally, the second exercise assists practitioners in refining and redirecting their consultancy approach based on these enhanced insights. Through the analysis and comparison of concepts across both maps, practitioners can evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions. Furthermore, the appearance of new concepts on the later map helps identify emerging challenges in the dynamic and evolving client experience within the world of sports, enabling practitioners to tailor the direction of their collaboration more effectively. The second map serves to monitor client development, emphasizing current relevance, though a simple recoloring of the first map might provide a more comparable measure for intervention impact.

The comments from both the practitioner and the participants suggest that the #PsychMapping exercise offers direct benefits to clients. It aids

in self-discovery and effectively demonstrates how consultancy can positively impact their sports experience. Firstly, the exercise aids clients in transforming their unstructured ideas into a more manageable form, making it easier to pinpoint crucial challenges. Allowing clients to take the summary map home encourages continued reflection and learning. Clients may contemplate responses to questions, cross-reference their ratings with day-to-day experiences, and, through the acquisition of self-knowledge, experience immediate benefits in autonomous problem management and self-regulation, as reported by two participants in this project.

Conclusion

The #PsychMapping exercise is a valuable tool for intake sessions, aiding practitioners in understanding the client and facilitating the client's self-discovery. It provides a structured yet flexible framework that allows for a comprehensive exploration of various factors influencing client performance and well-being. A second #PsychMapping exercise contributes to progress monitoring, establishing criteria for consultancy quality, and promoting a scientific professional approach (Schinke et al., 2024). The exercise's visual and interactive nature encourages client engagement and offers a tangible product for ongoing reflection. Its adaptability makes it suitable for diverse client profiles, including athletes, coaches, and referees, as evidenced in this study.

For trainees, the #PsychMapping exercise provides a clear framework and guidelines, enhancing their confidence and competence in conducting intake sessions and tracking client progress. Experienced practitioners can leverage the visual summary of client progress and challenges, to facilitate ongoing reflection and strategic planning, thereby enhancing the overall efficacy of their practice. The #PsychMapping exercise is particularly advantageous in contexts requiring detailed self-exploration and continuous monitoring. For example, it can be effectively used in high-performance sports settings, where understanding the intricate interplay of physical, psychological, and social factors is crucial for optimizing performance. It is also valuable in recreational sports contexts, helping individuals better understand issues such as performance anxiety or low self-esteem.

In conclusion, the #PsychMapping exercise provides a unique and effective approach for exploring client challenges and monitoring their progress. By facilitating a deeper understanding of client experiences and encouraging ongoing reflection, the #PsychMapping exercise aids in the development of targeted and effective interventions that significantly enhance client outcomes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s)

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this project are available from the corresponding author, ATL, upon reasonable request.

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