

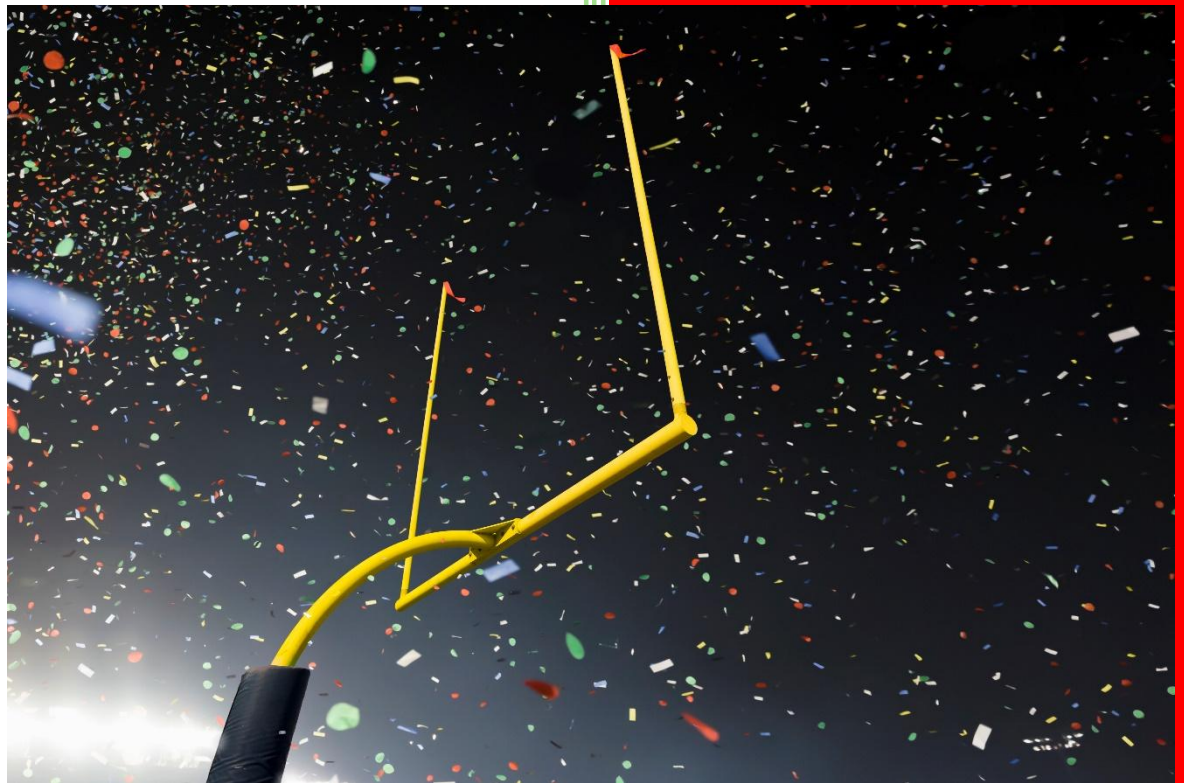


**TORRENS
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA**

Centre for
Organisational
Change and Agility

2025

Final Report: Optimising Career Transitions for Professional Athletes



**Roslyn Cameron & Christine
Edwards**
Torrens University Australia
9/10/2025

Acknowledgements:

This research was sponsored by the Centre for Organisational Change & Agility (COCA), Torrens University Australia (TUA) in partnership with ImproveMe.

The project collaborated with industry partners and was coordinated through the Project Advisory Committee. (PAC) made up of TUA researchers and representatives from ImproveMe and their key stakeholders. The PAC met regularly during the project co-design, research ethics application and approval and during the data collection stages.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank all those who participated in the research and took the time to speak with researchers and share their perceptions and experiences.

Members of the Project Advisory Committee

Torrens University Australia

Professor Roslyn
Cameron
Dr Christine Edwards

ImproveMe

Brent Lehmann
Claire King
Tom Lonergan
Shannon Byrnes
Lesley Mackenzie Douglas
Lisa Woolf



Resourcing:

This research was resourced by Torrens University Australia through the Vice Chancellor's PAN UNI Initiative and the Centre for Organisational Change & Agility (COCA).

CITATION: Cameron, Roslyn and Edwards, Christine, (2025) *Final Report: Optimising Career Transitions for Professional Athletes*. Torrens University Australia. Report. <https://doi.org/10.25905/31975620.v1>



**TORRENS
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA**

Centre for
Organisational
Change and Agility

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

2. Literature Review

2.1 Models and Conceptual theories

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

3.2 Ethics Clearance

4. Phase I Findings

5. Phase II Findings

6. Phase III Findings

7. Outcome of Study

8. Conclusions

8.1 Recommendations

8.2 Implications & Limitations

9. Reference

10. Appendices

Appendix A Ethics Approval

Appendix B Phase II Questionnaire Instrument

Appendix C Phase II Semi-Structured Interview Questions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Optimising Career Transitions for Professional Athletes: The role of Sporting Organisations

The purpose of this study is to explore innovative organisational approaches to optimising career transitions for professional athletes.

The project utilises a single case mixed methods research design focused on a particular case study organisation which was established for the specific aim of assisting adults, and in particular professional athletes, with career transitions out of professional sport. The case organisation is a privately owned business, founded in 2017 by four individuals with a strong interest in supporting personal growth and development, both inside and outside the professional sport community. The ImproveMe website houses a web-based assessment tool that originated to assist professional athletes identify their key competencies and assist them in preparing for a fulfilling career path in their life after sport, whilst contributing to a measurable improvement in their on-field performance.

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative across three sequential phases. Phase I involved a literature review of relevant career theories and concepts targeted at professional athletes and their career transitions and desk research which identified career services available to professional athletes. Phase II collected quantitative data through an exploratory online questionnaire of professional athletes who engaged with the case study organisation (n=40). Phase III involved the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with the case organisation founders and key external stakeholders (n=17).

Research Objective:

The overall objective of the study was to explore innovative ways to assist professional athletes forge new careers after leaving the professional sporting arena and support them navigate that transition to a future career.

The study was guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1: *What current career support services exist for professional athletes in Australia?*

RQ2: *Who are the key stakeholders in the context of supporting professional athletes in post career transitions?*

RQ3: *What organizational based innovations are assisting professional athletes to build career capital and support/navigate career transitions?*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Empowering Athletes Beyond the Game

In today's high-performance sporting landscape, the journey of an athlete extends far beyond the field, court, or track. To truly support athletes, we must reimagine career transition not as a final chapter, but as a continuous, integrated process that begins on day one.

As a result of the study and its findings the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1: Embed Transition Planning Early

It is vitally important for transition planning to be embedded from the very beginning of a professional athletes sporting career. From the moment an athlete signs their first contract, conversations about life beyond sport should be normalised. Dual identity development—balancing athletic excellence with future professional aspirations—must be embedded throughout their career. Transition is not a one-size-fits-all event; it's a dynamic, personalised journey. By using case management approaches and integrating career development into athlete pathways and collective bargaining agreements, we ensure that every athlete receives tailored support aligned with their particular sport, the stage, in their career and their career and life goals.

Recommendation 2: Build Self-Awareness and Agency

An essential part of the transition planning for professional athletes is empowering athletes through self-efficacy which starts with self-awareness. Through self-assessment tools, athletes can uncover their strengths, values, and transferable skills. This fosters a sense of ownership over their future, reducing anxiety and increasing engagement with career planning and developing longer term perspectives.

Recommendation 3: Provide Mentoring and Career Coaching

Mentorship is a cornerstone of successful career transitions for professional athletes. Structured programs that connect athletes with experienced mentors—especially those who've navigated transition themselves—offer invaluable guidance. It is also suggested that peer-to-peer learning across clubs and codes can further reduce feelings of isolation and normalises career conversations.

Recommendation 4: Expand Education and Training Opportunities

Expanding athletes' options in terms of education and training outside of the sport assists athletes to strengthen their post sport career options. To do this the education and training options must be flexible and athlete friendly. Whether through short courses, recognition of prior learning (RPL) or tertiary qualifications (VET or university studies), athletes should have access to diverse opportunities and learning pathways.

Recommendation 5: Facilitate Work Experience and Networking

Work experience is a valuable strategy for expanding career options for sporting professionals. It can provide authentic work-based experiences and expose athletes to potential future work and employment options. Practical exposure is key. Internships, job shadowing, and placements offer athletes a glimpse into future careers and can trigger future career aspirations. Clubs and sponsors can play a pivotal role by opening doors to

meaningful opportunities and expanding professional networks. Partnerships with universities and businesses can provide real-world experiences during off seasons, enriching both personal and professional development.

Recommendation 6: Prioritise Mental Health and Wellbeing

Experiencing career transitions can be emotionally taxing, especially when triggered by injury or deselection. Psychological support for career transitions of this nature must be integrated into development programs for professional athletes and ideally remain accessible post-career for these athletes. Flexible, personalised professional development and career plans ensure athletes are supported through both expected and unexpected changes across their respective sporting careers.

Recommendation 7: Improve Financial Literacy and Planning

Financial literacy and stability are foundational to career transition planning for professional athletes. Early and ongoing education in budgeting, investing, and planning for life after sport is essential. Structured savings or annuity schemes can provide long-term security and peace of mind.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen Institutional Commitment

Transition support must be a shared responsibility. Clubs, associations, and player agents should be held accountable through mandates in collective bargaining agreements. It is imperative that career development time and activities must be protected and prioritised.

Recommendation 9: Promote Cross-Sector Collaboration

Collaboration between key stakeholders such as sporting bodies, education providers, businesses, and government are vital. No single entity can do this alone. Sharing data, success stories, and best practices will drive

innovation, build momentum, and secure funding for sustainable transition programs for sporting professionals.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores innovative industry-based approaches to support athletes to build career capital to plan and prepare for a successful transition from their sporting role against a backdrop of a disrupted and rapidly changing landscape of work and employment configurations. The findings will have practical implications for adults (at different stages of the career life cycle), career professionals and educators and will potentially contribute to the further development of a framework for supporting adults in career transitions.

To establish a theoretical grounding for the study a comprehensive review of the literature is undertaken which examines the development of career concepts, research, and practice to understand the unique nature of career transitions for elite athletes in an increasingly dynamic world of work.

Numerous theories and frameworks across different management disciplines have shaped career research and practice since the early 19th century. While research over the years has increased understanding of the characteristics of career transition, both the nature of work and societal values continue to change.

Since Louis's (1980) seminal work defined career transition "...as the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on a different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering subjective state)" (p.303) careers are increasingly complex (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). Career attitudes and behaviours have changed in response to increased globalisation, and unprecedented technological advances (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Schwab, 2016). Individuals are making frequent transitions across multiple boundaries of occupations, industries, organisations, functional areas and countries (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The impact of increasingly widespread changes in the nature of work, employment, and employment arrangements and a re-evaluation of work vs. family priorities has led to approaches and direction of career research and practice in response to a fluid labour market and shifting social settings (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).emerge, not only reflect the dynamic nature of work, but also the shared understandings and communal

values of the times (Savickas, 2015). The emergence the protean (Hal, 1996) and the boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a) career in the 1990's represented a significant shift in thinking about career advancement, lifetime careers and career transition.

Transitioning out of a career from a sporting environment has unique challenges and difficulties for professional athletes as they plan and prepare a path of their choice to a career they value in a changing employment environment.

1.1 Background

Throughout an athlete's career is the ever-present emphasis on maximising performance while contracted to a team or sporting organisation. This focus on current players and their performance is hardly surprising as they are engaged for their athletic talents and their contribution to the team or sporting organisation's success. This focus often neglects what happens to athletes after they leave the sport and transition to a new career and lifestyle (Taylor & Lavalley, 2009). However, increasingly, administrators recognise their responsibility to enable athletes to pursue a career path of their choice, while being part of a sporting team or institution.

Concerns raised by athletes and media in the past decades has prompted sporting organisations to question their obligation in supporting athletes in their career transition and post sporting careers. Sporting careers are unique in that they generally short term. For example, Australian Rules footballers' careers on average last just six years (AFL Players' Association, 2024) and may end unexpectedly due to injury or deselection. In addition, sporting careers are characterised by high physical, psychological and emotional demands on personal performance often leading to burnout and chronic stress levels and poor work-life balance (Richardson & McKenna, 2021).

Evidence suggests most athletes experience unsuccessful transitions out of their sporting careers to a new life (Taylor & Lavalley, 2009; Agnew et al 2019; Knights et al, 2019). Transition to a life outside of sport has significant implications not only for athletes' social and professional development but also for their physical and mental well-being that may lead to anxiety, depression and loss of identity. The change from a structured team environment may be difficult to manage. The absence of a career plan for life after sport may lead to financial stress, social isolation and feelings of

loneliness, leading to poor decision making it difficult to find a new career. Narratives and increasing empirical research around athletes' transitioning out of sport suggest successful athlete career transition and adjusting to life after sport is a pervasive problem.

In the mid to late eighties, in response to this problem, several sporting organisations and sporting players associations in the USA and Canada, established career transition support programs to assist current athletes transitioning out of sport. In Australia the Lifeskills for Elite Athletes was created, later merging with the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program to provide consistent career and education services for current athletes (Australian Institute of Sport, n.d., para. 2).

In response to the intense and increasing competitive pressures players face and the growing concern for the health and well-being of their members, Australian professional sporting organisations and player associations have acknowledged their responsibility to support players to plan and prepare for their 'dual' career. The concept of dual careers is balancing sport and non-sport commitments in preparation for a successful 'life after sport' (Aquilina 2013; Lally 2007; Caprless and Douglas (2013). A variety of programs are available to support the development of a 'dual' career for players to build their career capital and maintain a healthy balance between life on and off the field (see table x). The provision of career transition support programs and services is firmly entrenched in Enterprise Agreements for the major Australian sporting organisations, further endorsing the dual career approach for profession athletes. While there are benefits for both the players and the organisation in developing dual careers, "the challenge of combining a sporting career with studies or work, ... remains a source of concern for most high-performance athletes" (Ryba et al. 2015, p. 125).

Interest in providing athletes with a positive transition out of sports has changed thinking of an athlete's career as simply enhancing performance, to a holistic perspective where an athlete's career is considered as an integral part of a lifelong career (Alfermann & Stambulova 2007; Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Career programs support athletes to achieve both athletic and personal success and apply what they have learned in their sport to benefit their

lifelong career aspirations (Gordon, Lavalley, & Grove, 2005; Stambulova, 2010).

For the purposes of this study transitions are defined as:

“turning phases in career development that manifest themselves by sets of demands athletes have to meet in order to continue successfully in sport and/or other spheres of life”
(Alfermann & Stambulova, p.95, 2007).

Transitions may be predictable or unpredictable. Successful transitions increase the chances a successful career in sport and adapting to the post-career. The inability to cope with a transition may lead to a crisis, often followed by negative long-term consequences, such as premature exit from sport, neuroses, alcohol/drug abuse (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Research continues monitor and evaluate the experiences of athletes with the aim of assisting transitioning athletes and career sustainability. To enable us to explore these innovative approaches and to address the research objectives and questions posited we undertook a review of the existing literature and research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature examines the development of career transition models and frameworks, research, and practice to understand the distinctive nature of career transitions for elite or professional athletes and future directions in an increasingly dynamic world of work.

2.1 Models and conceptual theories

Growing academic research into athlete careers draws on career transitions outside of sport and applies existing career transition models to identify the unique issues facing athletes as they exit their sporting careers and find predictors of successful career transitions for athletes.

Rosenberg (1982) compared retirement from sport as a social death characterised by social isolation and rejection from the former group. At the time was little empirical evidence to support this notion of social death (Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985; Blinde and Statta, 1992). Another approach was to focus on age and life stage satisfaction as factors dependent influencing career transition. However, these views were criticised for being focussed on retirement from sport as an abrupt and singular event (Blinde and Greendorfer, 1985).

Contrary to this view, Stambulova's (1994) Sports Transition Model (as cited in Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008) considered retirement as a continuing transition process developing throughout life. The focus of career transition therefore shifted from an ending of goals and interests to continuous and evolving process that included gradual change, modification and development of goals and interests. Stambulova (2003) identified factors for effective and ineffective transition and interventions to from which support can be provided. The model raises awareness of future transition demands to enable the athlete to develop appropriate resources to effectively cope with the transition (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Figure 1 below depicts the model.

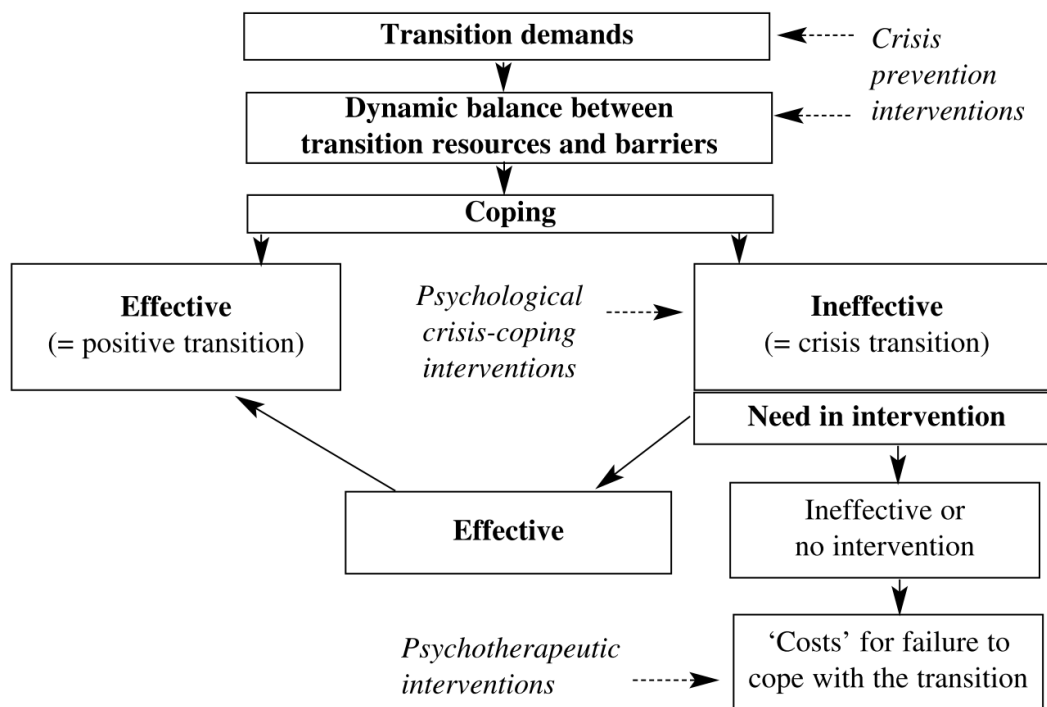


Figure 2.1. Sport Career Transition model (Stambulova, 2003, p. 100) (as cited in Kadlcik & Flemr, 2008)

Building in this idea of continuous transition, theorists considered the specific needs and unique concerns of athletes analysing personal, social, and environmental factors for athletes in transition. The Schlossberg (1981) Model of Human Adaption to Transition applied to athlete career transition emphasised athletes' perceptions of the transition and characteristics of pre and post transition environments and the attributes of individuals in their roles in the adaptation to the transition (Figure 2.2).

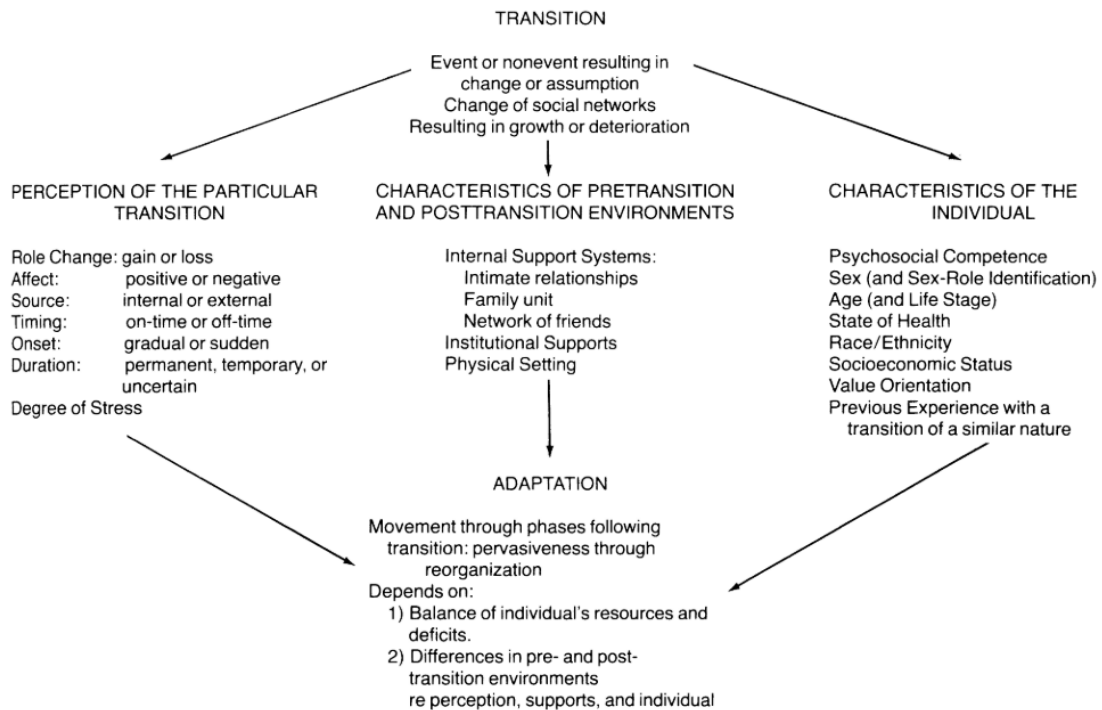


Figure 2.2 A model of human adaption to transition (Schlossberg,1981, p.5)

Schlossberg (1991) notes the importance of the athlete's perception of the transition. Changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles are defined by the individual experiencing it. The type, context, and impact of the transition must be considered to understand the meaning the transition has for an individual. With this individual perception of transition in mind, she describes the factors of how an individual copes with change, viewed either as potential assets or liabilities. Coping effectiveness is explained by including both resources and deficits, rather than just considering deficits.

Drawing on the Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Human Adaption to Transition and empirical research, the Taylor and Lavelle's (2009) five step Conceptual Model of Adaption to Career Transition (Figure 3) addresses the complete development of athletes' career transition experience. Taylor and Ogilvie's conceptual model considers the multi-dimensional complexities of athlete career transition. The model includes psychosocial (emotional, social, financial and occupational) factors interacting in response to the sport-career transition while accounting for the disposition of the individual athlete in transition. Five developmental stages are included in the model,

1) Cause of the transitions; 2) Developmental experiences; 3) Coping resources; 4) Quality of adaptation; and 5) Interventions. The model offers a sport specific framework for career transition practitioners to evaluate individual experiences of athletes in career transition and indicators of successful career transition processes to support athletes to prepare and function at the end of their sporting careers (Swain, 1991).

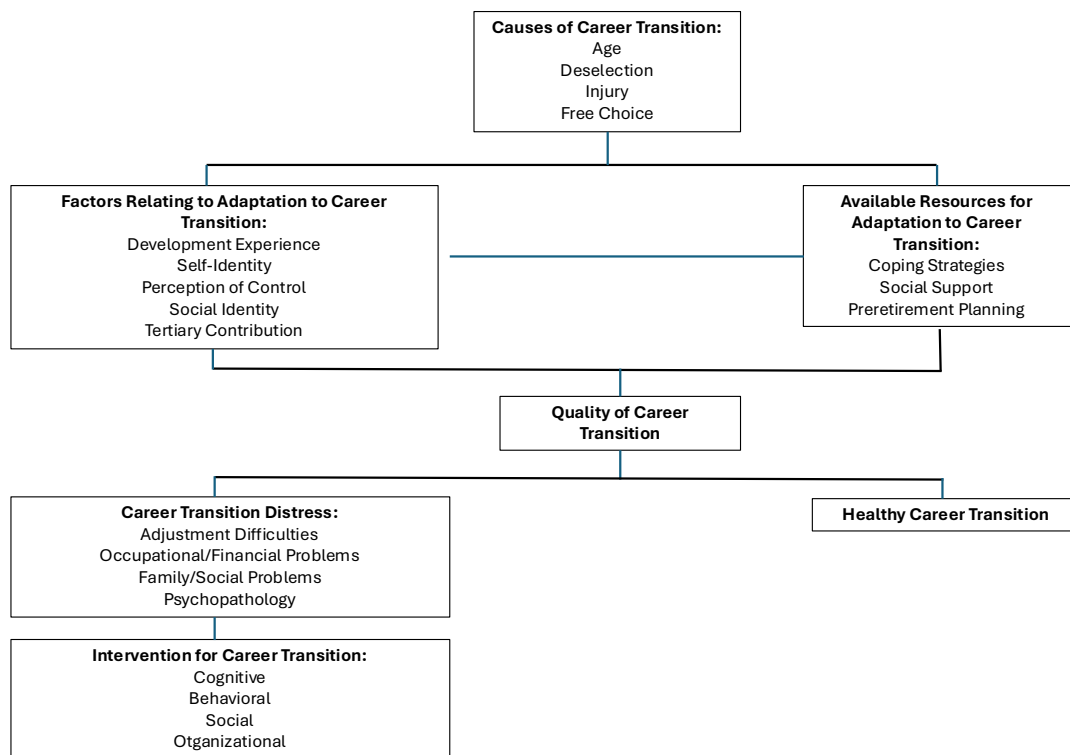


Figure 2.3. Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Lavalley, 2009, p.546)

Richardson and McKenna (2020) examined the individual, contextual and temporal dimensions of career *sustainability* rather than career *transition*. Richardson and McKenna interpret their findings using the Job-Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) to determine how athletes' post sporting careers are affected by the physical and psychological demands and resources of their sporting profession.

The Job-Demand Model (JD-R model) is a useful model to investigate career sustainability in professional sports as work environments are distinguished by occupation-specific job resources and job demands (Akkermans, Shaufeli, Brenninkmeijer, & Blonk, 2013, p.356). Bakker and

Demerouti (2017) define Job demands as the psychological, social, physical and organisational requisites of the job placed on the individual with related physiological and/or psychological costs. Job resources are the social, psychosocial, material or organisational dimensions of the job. Job resources enable individuals to meet their job demands (Figure 2.4).

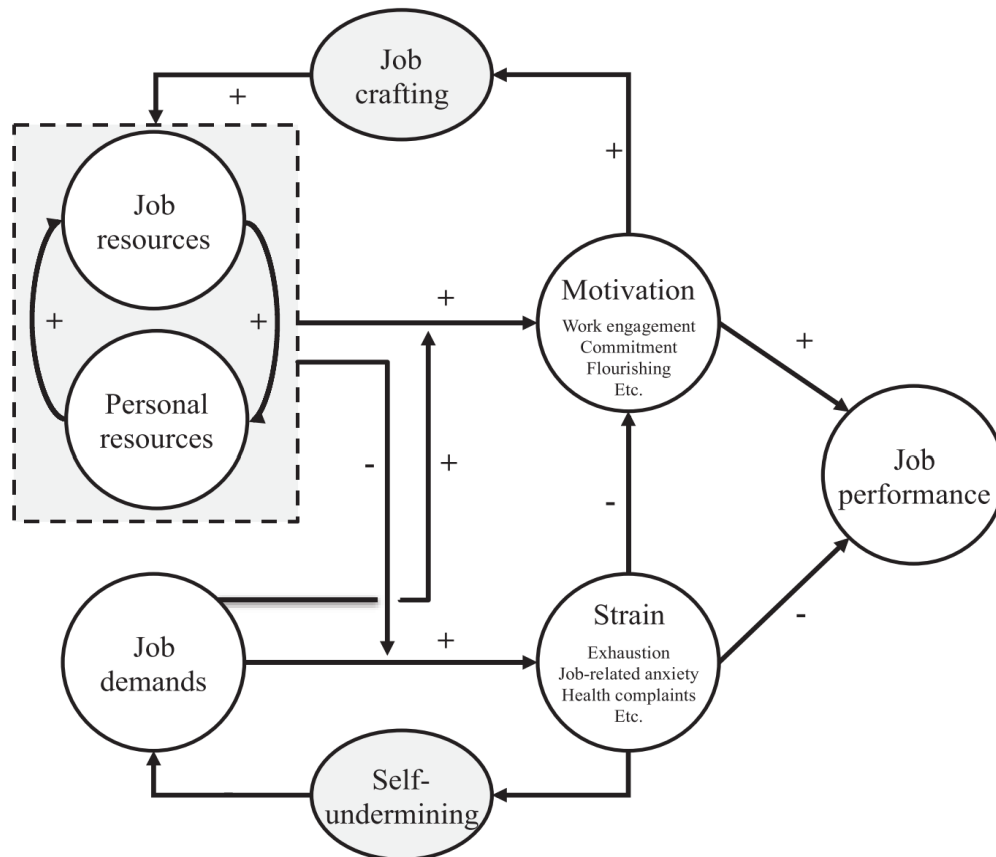


Figure 2.4. The job demands-resource model (JD-R model) (Bakker and Demerouti (2017, p.275)

Importantly, the concept of Job Demands and Job Resources are mutually dependent. For example, “employees who have many job resources available can cope better with their job demands” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). Also, Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model makes the connection between an individual’s health and wellbeing. When job demands are high and job resources/positives are low, stress and burnout increase. Conversely, a high number of job resources may offset the effects of high job demands.

We have drawn upon several of these models specifically Stambulova's (2003) Sport Career Transition Model and Schlossberg's (1981) Human Adaptation to Transition. The key concepts of transition as a continuous process influenced by personal, social and environmental factors from Stambulova's (2003) Sport Career Transition Model and the importance of individual perception, coping resources, and contextual support from Schlossberg's (1981) Human Adaptation to Transition model, informed our research methodology and data collection instruments,

This study explores innovative industry-based approaches to support athletes to build career capital to plan and prepare for a successful transition from their sporting role in a disrupted and rapidly changing landscape of work and employment configurations. The findings have practical implications for adults (at different stages of the career life cycle), career professionals and educators and can potentially contribute to the further development of a framework for supporting adults in career transition.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this project was to explore innovative organisational approaches to supporting professional/elite athletes in career transitions. This included an exploration of innovative approaches to supporting professional/elite athletes in career transitions. The methodology chosen to undertake the research and answer the research questions is a single case study using a mixed methods approach.

3.1 Research Design

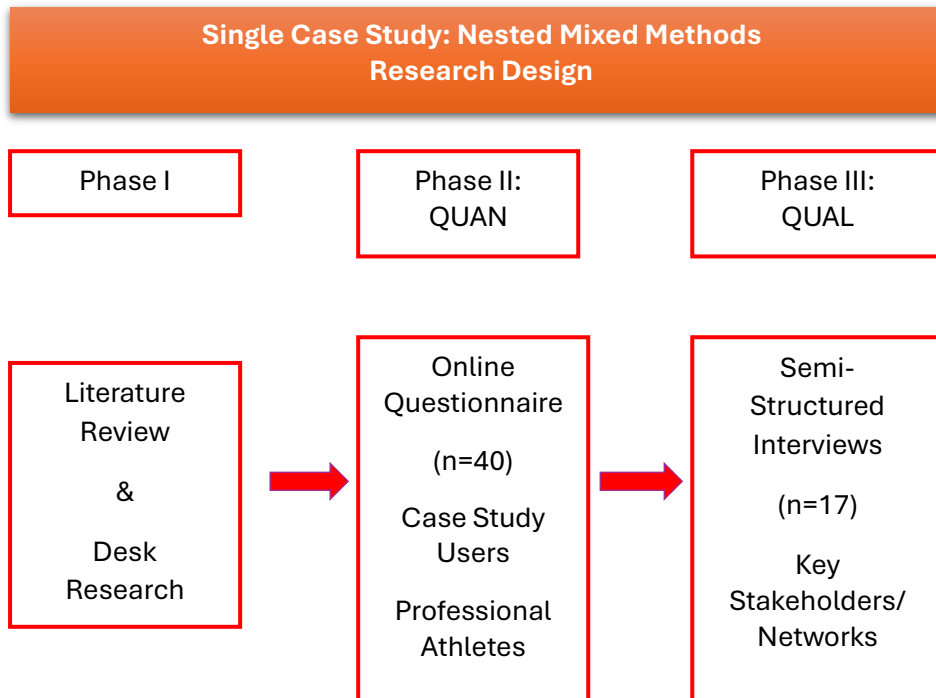
The project utilised a single case study, collecting the case study data through a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Guetterman and Fetters (2018) refer to this type of research design as a case study with nested mixed methods or a case study–mixed methods design (CS-MMR). In this study design both qualitative and quantitative data was collected sequentially across three phases.

Phase I of the study involved a literature review of relevant career theories and models that focus on career transitions and desk research of current career services that are available to professional sports people in Australia.

Phase II involved the collection of quantitative data through an online questionnaire of users of the case study organisation, ImproveMe.

Phase III employed the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders within the case study organisation and external stakeholders of the case study organisation.

Figure 3.1 provides a visual depiction of the case study design.

Figure 3.1 Case Study Mixed Methods Research (CS-MMR) Design

Phase I: Literature Review & Desk Research

Phase I involved a literature review of contemporary career development theoretical applications was undertaken and focused on theories which addressed how to optimize career transitions for elite/professional athletes. Additionally Phase I also involved secondary data analysis through the mapping of current career services available to Australian adults. Adults who are studying in tertiary institutions such as TAFEs and universities have access to career services and other specific career transition services are available for example to ex-employees of the Australian Defence Forces and other specialised services for those undergoing rehabilitation due to work-based accidents funded by the Commonwealth Government (Safe Work Australia: Workplace Rehabilitation providers).

The result from this Phase enabled the compilation of a table of current career services available to professional athletes (see Table 4.1).

Phase II: Online Questionnaire

This phase involved an online questionnaire of case study client users' professional athletes/ex-professional athletes. The questionnaire was exploratory as small sample size numbers were anticipated. The data collection instrument was mainly quantitative with forced choice, multiple response questions and some open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire. There was a total of 40 respondents.

Sample

The semi structured interview respondents were end users of the career transition website and its resources and their connection to sport was dominated by male AFL teams which reflects one of the Founders own AFL backgrounds and his own professional career as an AFL player. The large majority are/were AFL players. The other sports represented included: Soccer; Olympic water polo; cycling and shooting.

Analysis

Analysis of the online questionnaire data was generated through SurveyMonkey software which produced descriptive statistics. Many questions were either forced choice of multiple response questions and so the analysis resulted in descriptive univariate statistical analysis.

Phase III: Semi-Structured Interviews

Phase III involved qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews of case study founders/members and key stakeholders. These semi-structured interviews were conducted via virtual meeting technologies. Participants were invited to participate in the interviews; these were recorded and transcribed using a professional transcription service. Interviewees had the transcripts returned and were asked to make any adjustments they wished to have made (member checking).

The semi-structured interview questions were aligned to key theoretical concepts from Richardson & McKenna (2020) to examine the individual, contextual and temporal dimensions of Career Sustainability that determine the effects of the physical and psychological demands and resources of athlete's sporting profession. In addition to these, questions from both Phase II and Phase III data collection instruments drew upon the models of career transition by Schlossberg (1991), Stambulova (2003) and Taylor & Lavalley (2009).

Table 3.1 provides a conceptual alignment between the study's research questions, key theoretical concepts and questions from Phase II and Phase III data collection instruments (see Appendices B & C for details).

Table 3.1 Conceptual Alignment of Research Questions and Concepts/Models with Phase II and Phase III data collection instruments

Research Questions Key Concepts & Models	Phase II Questionnaire Questions	Phase III Interview Questions
RQ1: <i>What current career support services exist for professional athletes in Australia?</i>		Q2: Historically what have you known to be the career support services offered to professional athletes whilst they are in their respective athletic career? Q3: What types of career support services are currently offered by your organisation?
RQ2: <i>Who are the key stakeholders in the context of supporting professional athletes in post career transitions?</i>		Q8: In an ideal world what would you suggest could be done for professional athletes during their sporting careers to better prepare them for the transition out of that career?

<p>RQ3: <i>What organizational based innovations are assisting professional athletes to build career capital and support/navigate career transitions?</i></p>		<p>Q7: Are you aware of any innovative approaches to supporting professional athletes as they transition out of their respective professional athlete careers</p>
<p>Perceptions of Transitions Schlossberg (1991)</p>	<p>C13 C14 C15 C16 C17</p>	<p>Q9: What interventions would better support professional athletes in career transitions so they experience a healthy career transition and can improve their adaption and coping strategies?</p>
<p>Adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Lavalley, 2009)</p>	<p>C10 C11</p>	<p>Q6: How different are these issues when retirement is forced (injury and or poor performance) as compared to voluntary/planned retirement?</p>
<p>Career Sustainability (Richardson & McKenna, 2021).</p>		<p>3: What types of career support services are currently offered by your organisation?</p> <p>Q4b: What career transition support do you feel is most needed for professional athletes? Top three</p> <p>Q5: How different, if at all, are these issues for individual sport people as compared to team sport professional athletes?</p> <p>Q9: What interventions would better support professional athletes in career transitions so they experience a healthy career transition and can improve their adaption and coping strategies? TOP THREE</p> <p>Q10: What sort of resources do they need to have access to in order to address these issues?</p>

Sport Career Transition model (Stambulova, 2003)	C12 C13	Q9: What interventions would better support professional athletes in career transitions so they experience a healthy career transition and can improve their adaption and coping strategies?
--	------------	--

Sample

The recruitment of the semi-structured interview respondents was conducted purposively due to consideration of who holds the appropriate level of decision-making responsibilities within the case organisation. Participants were drawn from across the case/organisation and represent senior management/leadership. were end users of the career transition website and its resources. Their connection to sport was dominated by male AFL teams which reflects one of the Founders own AFL backgrounds and his own professional career as an AFL player. The large majority are/were AFL players. The other sports represented included: Cricket, Rugby Union; an Olympian; Ice Hockey and Basketball.

Analysis

The transcripts were analysed using thematic coding. This involved familiarisation with the data based on set of semi-structured interview questions and their alignment with concepts and theories (see Table 3.2). This enabled the generation of initial codes which was undertaken manually and then lead to the development of main themes. The researchers then reviewed these themes and aligned these against the study's research questions.

3.2 Ethics Clearance

The study has Ethics Approval from the Torrens University Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC#0152) (see Appendix A).

PHASE I FINDINGS

Research Question 1: *What current career support services exist for professional athletes in Australia?*

Table 4.1: Current career support services exist for professional athletes in Australia

Service	Description	Provider
ImproveMe	Provide tools for individual and organisation for successful career transition. Tools include Three key factors set ImproveMe apart from other profiling tools: Competency based assessment, Peer assessment and Guidance to what to do next.	ImproveMe https://improveme.com.au/
Ignite Athlete Employment Program	Supports and develops the professional ambitions of Australian athletes, offering flexibility, career growth, remuneration, and well-being support.	Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and Deloitte Australia Ignite Athlete Employment Program Australian Institute of Sport
Career Practitioner Referral Network (CPRN)	Provides professional career advice and guidance, including career planning, exploration, skill building, and employment support.	Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Career Practitioner Referral Network Australian Institute of Sport
Elite Sports Education Network Athlete	Provides integrated, services and programs support to of athletes, coaches and staff in their studies and navigate their career in high performance sport and to enable them to achieve sustained success in sport and in life.	Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) https://www.diving.org.au/elite-athletes/career-education/ and partner universities, TAFE and other approved education providers.

		Elite Sport Education Network Australian Institute of Sport
Athlete Accelerate Program	For retired women athletes who are pursuing career options in the sport sector. Provides a career and personal development opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills and tools to navigate a professional career in sport.	Australian Institute of Sport Athlete Accelerate Program Australian Institute of Sport Funded by the Australian Government 23/24 Federal budget.
Rugby League Players Association (RLPA)	Provides support to NRL players during periods of transition and in retirement from professional rugby league categorised under the five key pillars of the program: Transition, Medical, Financial, Connection, and Mental Fitness.	Rugby League Players Association https://www.rlpa.com.au/past-player-and-transition-program/
The Advantage Line Player Development Program	Provides direct and specialist support to professional players, past and present. There are 6 key pillars in the program: Career and Education, Wellbeing, Financial Management, Cultural Awareness, Personal Toolkit, Integrity and Obligations	Rugby Union Players Association (RUPA) https://rupa.rugby/for-players/education-and-development
Australian Basketball Players Association (ABPA)	Provides Career Transition Services including support and services for transition into and out of the game, career planning, CVs Resumes and interviewing skills	Australian Basketball Players Association https://www.australianbasketballers.com.au/players-resources#career
Career planning	Offers a range of career transition services including	Australian Football League Players Association (AFLPA)

<p>Australian Football league Players Association (AFLPA)</p>	<p>Past player support programs, Off-field development and career transition support, transition, annual transition camps and Next Goal Work Placement program.</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one transition support meetings during their career and while transitioning out of the game with followed up in the first 12 months of being out of the system. • Independent one-on-one Career Coaching, Financial Health Checks and wellbeing support throughout their career and up to three years post transition from the game. <p>Education and training grants during their careers, and for up to five years after they've left the system.</p> <p>Scholarships through Torrens University Australia, including flexibility and direct contact with education officers.</p>	<p>Torrens University Australia https://www.aflplayers.com.au/news-feed/stories/torrens-university-and-the-afl-players-association-renew-partnership</p>
<p>Game Plan Australian Cricketers' Association's wellbeing and education program.</p>	<p>Provides a tailored approach to member wellbeing based on the different stage of career a player. Includes MyEducation, MyWellbeing, MyCareer.</p>	<p>Australian Cricketer's Association (ACA) https://auscricket.com.au/gameplan</p>
<p>Wellbeing and Player Transitions</p>	<p>Provides career transition support for netball players including facilitating</p>	<p>Australian Netball Players' Association (ANPA)</p>

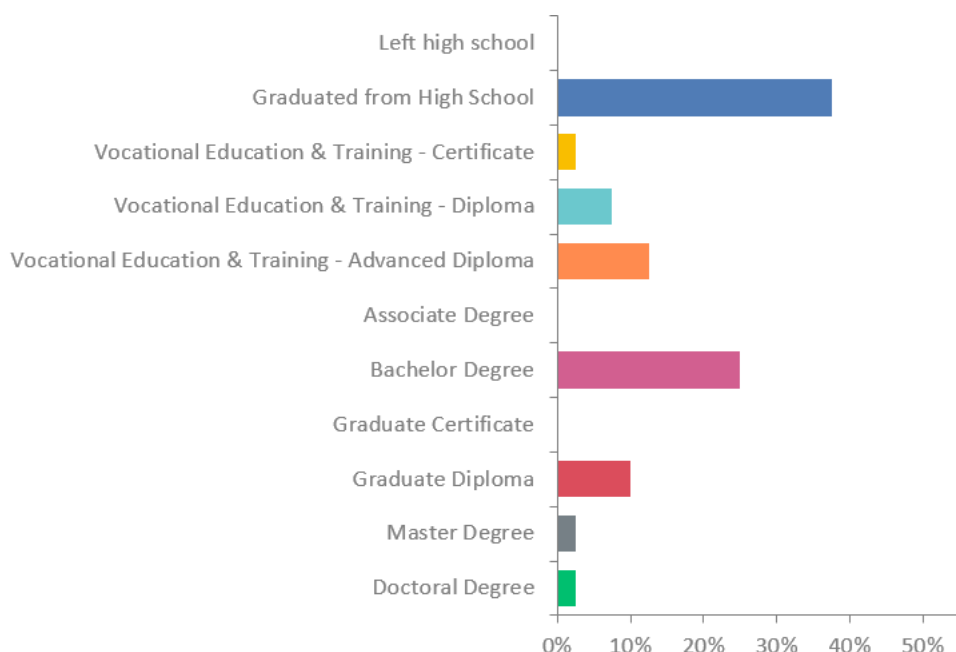
Australian Netball Players' Association (ANPA)	wellbeing initiatives and guiding career transitions.	https://www.ausnetballpa.com.au/
---	---	---

4. PHASE II FINDINGS

Phase II involved the collection of data through an exploratory quantitative online questionnaire of case study client/users (ImproveMe) who were professional athletes or ex-professional athletes.

The online questionnaire and quantitative data were analysed through the SurveyMonkey software. A total of 40 responses were received.

The demographics collected on respondents were as follows: they were predominantly male respondents (90%) and predominantly under 34 years of age with 37.5% in age range 18-24 years and 37.5% also in age range 25-34 years. The large majority were employed on a full-time basis (n=34 or 85%) and two (5%) were full time students, two were working part time, one was self-employed, and another was not employed and looking for work. In terms of the highest level of education 37.5% indicated they had graduated from High School, 25% had a bachelor's degree and 22.5% had a VET qualification refer to Table 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 Highest level of Education

After a set of demographic questions respondents were asked what types of career support activities they felt were important. The results are listed below:

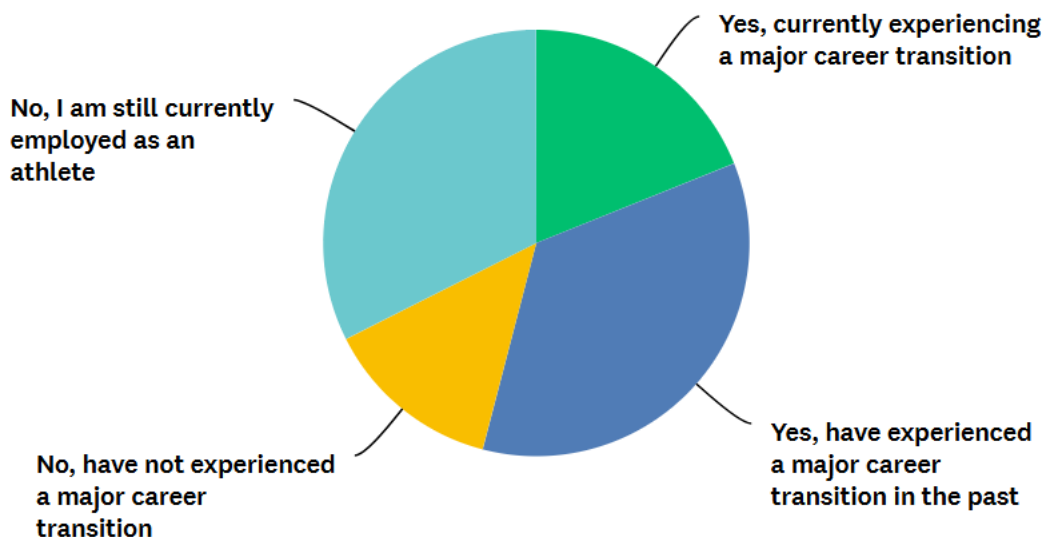
- **Assessment to understand skills, values, and interests:** 97% of respondents rated this as either 'Very Important' (63%) or 'Important' (34%).
- **Career planning advice:** 100% rated this as 'Very Important' (63%) or 'Important' (37%). - **Occupations and job market choices:** 94% rated this as 'Very Important' (58%) or 'Important' (37%), with only 1 respondent each for 'Not Sure' and 'Not Important'.
- **Listings of volunteering and internship opportunities:** 71% rated this as 'Important' or 'Very Important', while 21% were 'Not Sure' and 8% said 'Not Important'.
- **Career information accessible face to face at an office:** 79% rated this as 'Important' or 'Very Important', 11% were 'Not Sure', and 11% said 'Not Important'.
- **Career information accessible online:** 97% rated this as 'Important' or 'Very Important', with only 1 respondent saying, 'Not Important'.
- **Career coaching one-on-one delivered face-to-face:** 87% rated this as 'Very Important' or 'Important', and 13% were 'Not Sure'.
- **Career coaching one-on-one delivered online/virtually:** 81% rated this as 'Very Important' or 'Important', and 18% were 'Not Sure'.

Overall, respondents placed high importance on receiving help with all aspects of career development, especially in assessment, planning, and access to information both online and in person.

When asked if they had gone on to further study (further education and/or training) 43% indicated that they had.

Respondents were then asked if they had experienced or currently experiencing a major career transition with possible options as depicted in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Experience with major career transition



If respondents indicated yes, then they were asked a series of career transition questions. Those that responded that they had not were redirected to the questionnaire questions after the career transition question using skip logic.

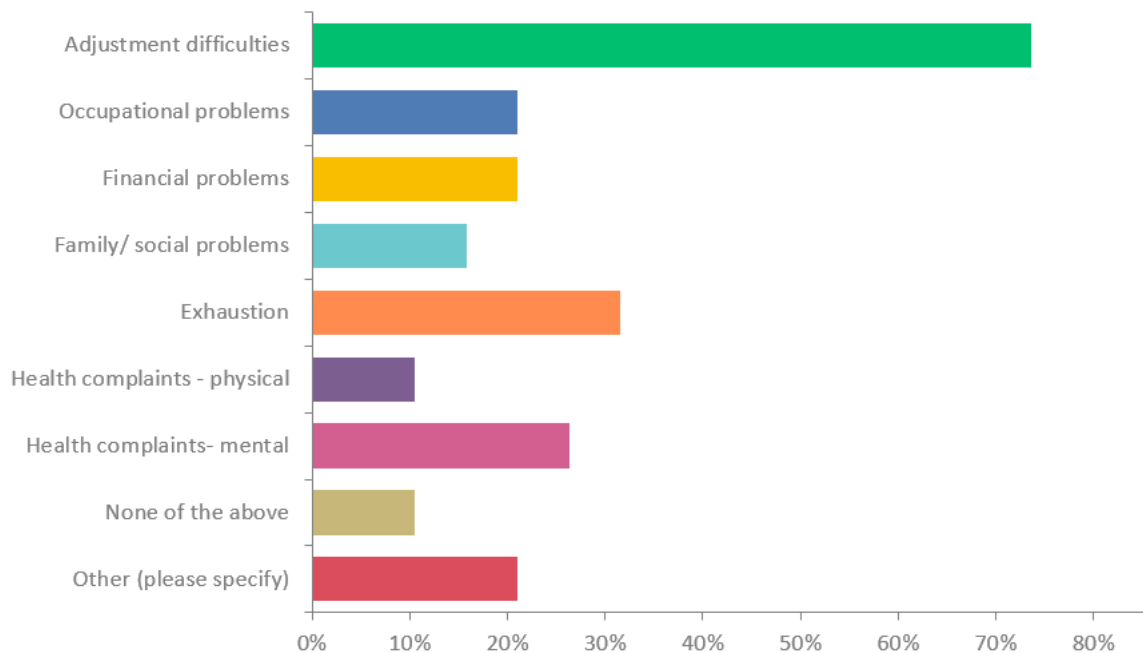
Subset: Those who had experienced or were currently experiencing a career transition (n=19)

Those who had experienced or were currently experiencing a major career transition (n=19) were then asked whether this career transition was forced

or voluntary. Of these 19 respondents 12 indicated this was forced and 7 indicated it was voluntary.

Respondents were then asked if they suffered or were suffering any forms of career transition stress. They could tick all that applied. Overall, adjustment difficulties were the most prevalent form of stress during career transitions, with a significant number also experiencing exhaustion, mental health complaints, and financial or occupational problems.

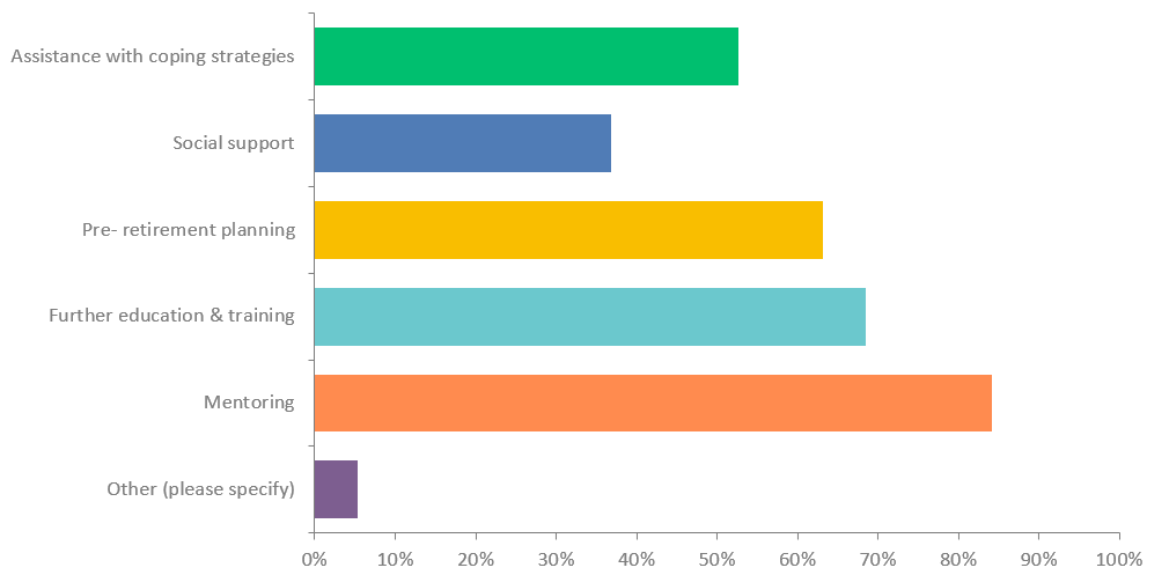
Figure 5.3 Forms of career transition stress



Respondents were then asked:

How important/helpful were or would the following be in assisting you to cope and adapt to a major career transition?

This was also a multiple response question. Figure 5.5 below indicates that the highest activities for coping with a career transition was mentoring, followed by Further education & Training and Pre-retirement planning and coping strategies.

Figure 5.4 Assistance with coping with major career transition

Overall, mentoring, further education, and pre-retirement planning were seen as the most important or helpful supports for coping with career transitions.

The next set of questions reflect the model by Schlossberg (1981) and the model's breakdown of the perceptions of the transition in terms of: Affect; Source; Timing; Onset and Duration.

When asked if the career transition was either “negative” (n=6), “positive” (n=6) or “neutral” (n=7) there was an even spread across the three possible responses.

When asked whether it was an internal or external decision (source). Thirteen respondents indicated that it was an internal decision while the remainder (n=6) indicated it was an external decision.

In terms of the timing of the career transition the majority indicated it was “On-time- expected at this time” (n=13) and the remainder stated it was “Off-time – earlier than expected” (n=6).

In relation to the onset of the career transition more respondents indicated it was gradual (n=11) and the others indicated it was “sudden” (n=8).

It terms of the duration of the career transition the choices were “permanent” (n=12); “temporary” (n=3) and “uncertain” (n=4).

Experience with ImproveMe (n=34)

The larger cohort of respondents (including the subset of those who experienced a transition) were then asked a set of questions related to their experience with the services offered by ImproveMe. Please note that some 6 respondents had dropped off the questionnaire for these remaining questions in the survey.

Respondents were asked:

What did you gain/ learn through the services offered by ImproveMe by indicating their level of agreement with the following statements

Figure 5.5 ImproveMe services



Overall, most respondents reported positive learning outcomes from the ImproveMe services, especially in career decision-making and self-knowledge.

Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with ImproveMe services and results are depicted in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Satisfaction with ImproveMe Services

Overall, satisfaction was generally positive, with 'Excellent' and 'Good' being the most common ratings across all aspects. A notable portion of respondents indicated they did not seek certain services.

There were two open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire asking:

What resources and services could have made your career transition experience more positive?

The most frequently mentioned resource was 'Mentorship Programs' (19%). - 'Personal Coaching Services' (14%) and 'Individualized Support' (10%) were also commonly cited. - Other notable themes included 'Transition Process Awareness', 'Peer Support Groups', 'Work Experience Programs', 'Specialized Career Support', 'Organizational Support', 'Career Sector Insights', 'Career Engagement', 'Professional Networking Resources', 'Personal Development', 'Group Video Discussions', and 'Financial and Psychological Guidance' (each mentioned by about 5% of respondents).

Overall, respondents highlighted the importance of mentorship, personalized support, and increased awareness or guidance as key resources that could improve the career transition experience.

What advice would you give someone who is experiencing a major career transition?

Here are some of the responses to this open-ended question:

Start preparing for it earlier on when you're a player.

Start the process as soon as you enter the system.

Don't tackle it alone, there are some great people and programs that will help overcome any anxiety and uncertainty.

Be proactive and seek help/ support from family / friends / support groups Get involved with community (sporting clubs, volunteering, interest groups) Stay active.

Learn what your strengths are. It can help build confidence and reduce transition anxiety

Take your time, it's stressful and exhausting and that's natural, embrace the challenge as you would in any other sport or part of your life and try to enjoy the process.

6. PHASE III FINDINGS

Phase III involved semi-structured interviews with a sample of representatives from sporting bodies, coaches and sporting organisations.

Sampling

Convenience and snowball sampling strategies were utilized. The sample was drawn from a variety of sports both in Australia and overseas (USA, Ireland and UK).

The participant's past and current involvement in professional sport also varied. Many were past players (n= 9), some were past coaches (n= 3) or current players (n=3). Their current roles were all involved in some way with professional sport as consultants or with their own related businesses or with a professional sporting club. The participants were predominantly male (n= 14/17) with four female participants. Whilst less than ideal to ensure a balanced view across all genders, the early years of ImproveMe were focused on the delivery of services into traditional, male sports. In recent years, this has evolved to incorporate female sports, and female athletes, with a small number of early participants, including athletes, ex-athletes, and service providers included to reflect the importance of their contribution. The details of participants are detailed in Table 6.2.

As stated, seventeen semi-structured interviews were undertaken by the two researchers. Participants were asked a series of semi-structured interview questions (refer to Appendix B). The interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams technology for online collaboration and transcribed. Transcripts were cleaned and member checking was undertaken with participants. The main themes that emerged from the analysis are summarised below in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Main Themes

Main Theme	Sub Themes
1. Contexts	1.1 Historical career support 1.2 Current career support
2. Key Issues	
3. Most needed support	

4. Differences between Team and Individual sport	
5. Forced vs Voluntary Retirement	
6. Innovative Approaches	
7. Ideal Support During Sport Careers	7.1 Top 3 Interventions 7.2 Resources needed

Table 6.2 Phase II Sample

Interviewee	Gender	Player/Coach - Past or Current	Current role	Organisation	Sport
SSI01	M	Past player Past coach	Consultant	Own business	AFL
SSI02	F	N/A	Consultant	Consultant	N/A
SSI03	M	Past Player	Player Welfare Officer	Professional Sporting club	AFL
SSI04	M	Past player	Player Welfare Officer	Professional Sporting club	Cricket AFL
SSI05	M	Past player	Coach / mentor	University	Cricket
SSI06	M	Past player	Head Coach	Professional Sporting club	AFL
SSI08	M	Past player	Consultant	Own business	Ice Hockey
SSI09	M	Past coach	Consultant	Own business	Cricket
SSI10	M	Current player	Player	Professional Sporting club	AFL
SSI11	M	Past player	Marketing consultant	Construction Industry	Rugby Union
SSI12	M	Past coach	Elite Student Athlete Coordinator	University	AFL
SSI13	M	N/A	Managing Director	Own business	N/A
SSI14	M	N/A	CEO	Professional Sporting club	Basketball
SSI15	F	N/A	Personal Development Adviser	Australian Institute of Sports AIS	Olympian
SSI16	M	Current player	Player	Professional Sporting club	AFL
SSI17	F	Past player			Olympian
SSI18	F	Past player			Basketball

MAIN THEMES

The following provides summaries for the seven main themes and provides supporting evidence from the interviews.

T

HEME 1: CONTEXTS

The following provides summaries for both past and current contexts for the career support for professional athletes.

SUB THEME 1.1: Historical Career Support Services for Athletes

- **Limited or non-existent** support historically, especially 20–30 years ago.

This participant responded to the following question:

Historically what have you known to be the career support services offered to professional athletes whilst they are in their respective athletic career?

“Non-existent 20 to 30 years ago, gathered momentum and prominence in the last 10 to 15 years.” - SSI01 (Past player & coach, AFL)

- Career support has **gained momentum in the last 10–15 years**, particularly as sports became full-time professions.

“It's changed since I was a player. Player support services. Before the player support person was there for when things went wrong. If a player was struggling or if things were going wrong with their life, they would step in...” - SSI03 (Past player, AFL)

- Support varied **greatly across sports and organisations**, with no consistent or holistic approach.

“Resourcing differs from sport to sport and in the AFL from club to club. Some clubs resource the player development area more than others. Some clubs may have one person.” - SSI04 (Past player, Cricket, AFL)

- Earlier support was often **reactive**, stepping in during crises rather than proactively preparing athletes.

“There's been quite an evolution, but historically, it was well intention but hap hazard and cosmetic ...” - SSI12 (Past coach, AFL)

SUB THEME 1.2: Current Career Support Services Offered

The forms of support are outlined below.

- **Online platforms** (e.g., assessments, career matching, resources like TED Talks, podcasts).

“There is (sic) a couple of different paths. One is the online services that is online assessment. Athletes answer questions and identify their top two strengths, and skills to take into the workforce.” - SSI02 (Consultant)

- **One-on-one coaching, mentoring, and counselling.**

“There is improved partnering with people that can help identify strengths, like ImproveMe to provide support and guidance.” - SSI10 (Current player, AFL)

- **Workshops and group sessions** on personal branding, social media, presentation skills, etc.

“Media training, even like mental health and psychology support was big throughout my career.” - SSI11 (Past Player. Mgt. Consultant, Rugby Union)

- **Career action plans** and access to career advisors, especially in AFL and cricket.

“A sporting organisation has wellbeing officers who look after an athlete in terms of their off-field needs, that might be mental health, and also may be to deal with careers and advice and networks and positioning them ...” - SSI09 (Past coach, Cricket)

- **Performance lifestyle mentors** in university settings.

“Most of the post study career options are done within the faculties. That's one of Melbourne's [university] specialities. Is their tight connexion with industry and internships involved in all the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Liaising with sporting organisations, whether it be an AFL club or a national sporting association to organisation to enlighten them that if students were to start studying here, a lot of what they perceive as their work in terms of what is a formal career looks like post sport or during alongside sport is going to be done for them by the university from within the faculties, and that the tools that they would be equipped with here would become self-explanatory and fit within the sporting environment.” - SSI12 (Past coach, AFL)

- **Structured programs** like the PCA in the UK and the AIS Career Practitioner Referral Network in Australia.

“The CPRN. The Career Practitioners will do anything from resume writing all the way to exploring different careers. They might use different types of psychometric profiling to sort of work with an athlete ...” - SSI15 (Past Olympian)

THEME 2: KEY ISSUES AFFECTING ATHLETES DURING CAREER TRANSITION

Participants identified the key issues impacting athletes during career transitions as follows.

- **Identity crisis:** Loss of athletic identity and uncertainty about future roles.

“First and foremost is the identity crisis. They're known for who they are in that sporting field, and they don't have an alternate identity from which to develop a transition plan around.” - SSI01 (Past player & coach, AFL)

“Identity is 1. Athletes are strongly connected to being an athlete, that's who they are and that's what gives them a credit in all the sort of forms of life, not just at the club but with their friends and family ...” - SSI03 (Past player, AFL)

- **Mental health challenges:** Anxiety, depression, stress, and substance abuse.

Fears, fear around if I don't make this career last whilst I'm in it, will I look back and regret it?” - SS104 (Past player, Cricket, AFL)

- **Lack of self-awareness:** Athletes often don't recognise their transferable skills.

“Self-awareness, self-assessment tools and strategies, plays to the heart of the identity crisis, and not realizing they've have highly desirable transferable skills.” - SSI01 (Past player & Coach, AFL)

- **Financial stress:** Poor financial planning and sudden loss of income.

“Financial. Managing transition financially. Most players exit asset rich and cash flow poor. Identity. Finding answers for what you want to do, you want to go while you're playing can be hard cause you're a time poor. It takes time ...” - SSI10 (Current player, AFL)

- **Time constraints:** Limited time during athletic careers to prepare for transition.

"... to do all this properly requires incredible coordination of resources and the sports don't have the time to do it. ... It's a lot of lip service paid from both sides. There's a big hole there." -SS109 (Past coach, Cricket)

- **Age and maturity:** Younger athletes often lack life experience and foresight.

"One of the big issues the young age of the player. The AFL as an example, players in the 22&23 and below age bracket who don't necessarily even realise that they should be starting to think about their transition." - SS102 (Consultant)

- **Environmental factors:** Support varies depending on sport, club, and individual circumstances.

"It's entirely environmental. It depends on how they've been nurtured and what the environment has offered and is seen as normal and advocated for. It varies wildly." - SS112 (Past coach, AFL)

THEME 3: MOST NEEDED CAREER TRANSITION SUPPORT (TOP 3)

Participants identify the following as the top 3 career support needed for athletes to successfully transition out of professional sport.

"Athletes don't recognise the skills they build in a sporting environment and how those are transferable to the outside world. Helping them understand that is crucial." — SS102 (Consultant)

1. **Self-awareness and career self-assessment tools** – to help athletes understand their strengths, values, and transferable skills.

This stresses the importance of self-discovery and personal development during an athlete's career.

"Self-awareness is important. I talk to players around self-awareness from a game point of view, where their actual game is more in that aspect than a career transition point of view. The guys I'm mentoring, self-awareness is something that we would do if we were looking at that transition process." - SS106 (Head Coach, AFL)

2. **Mentoring and career coaching** – ongoing guidance and accountability.

"Career coaching. Education training. Long term transition plans. If you if I had fourth, would be mentoring." - SS113 (MD, Own Business)

3. **Education, training, and occupational advice** – access to learning opportunities and career pathways.

“An education process with universities that is really focused on just helping athletes be the best they can be off the court or off the pitch or off the ground, would be a fantastic initiative.” - SSI14 (CEO, Basketball)

Other frequently mentioned supports:

- **Long-term transition planning**
- **Wellbeing and mental health strategies**
- **Feelings of agency and control** – empowering athletes to take ownership of their future.

“Transition is difficult for both the player and their family as they go through the stages of grief. They may never play again. There is a lot to deal with from the emotional and wellbeing point.” - SSI04 (Past player – AFL & Cricket)

THEME 4: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM SPORT

Participants acknowledged that for individual and team-based athletes that the career transition could be quite different.

“In a team sport, you’ve got people around you to compare yourself with and get inspiration from. Individual athletes might be fending for themselves unless they belong to an association.” - SSI04 (Past player, AFL & Cricket)

- **Team sport athletes** benefit from peer support, shared experiences, and cultural norms around career planning.

Overall, I'm not sure there is any different, but they are different environments. When you're in an attainment team environment, there are other supports around you, your peers and your colleagues. Which may help in being able to discuss transition, injuries...” - SSI09 (Past coach, Cricket)

- **Individual athletes** often show greater **self-reliance and resilience** but may lack team-based support structures.

“I think the one thing with individual sport athletes is, there's less reliance on like your teammates. So you don't miss that as much.” - SSI08 (Ice Hockey Player, USA)

- Differences are often **contextual**, depending more on the **organisation’s support systems** than the sport type itself.

“That probably has to be independently around organised, but in terms of support structure and what does their environment say about preparing for life after sport, that would come from the coaches, whether they're involved with an institute strength and

conditioning coaches, psychologists, physiologists, they have equivalent individual athletes would have equivalent team or equivalent support personnel.” - SSI12 (Past Coach, AFL)

- **Part-time athletes** (e.g., in AFLW or netball) often maintain dual careers, which can aid transition.

“The introduction of the AFLW is a real positive for this (dual careers), because while the AFLW is in its infancy, the players are coming in with dual careers, albeit whether they're currently studying or they're working, they're doing their football in addition to what they have already established career wise. There's a genuine benefit of having that dual career, it'll assist with transition after sport. It'll also assist with their wellbeing their identity whilst in the game.” - SSI04 (Past Player, Cricket / AFL)

THEME 5: FORCED v's VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT

Participants reflected on what the impacts are for athletes who experience forced retirement and for those that experience voluntary retirement.

The result from this analysis reinforces the value of career planning and readiness for all athletes and acknowledges the emotional toll of retirement and the need for holistic support systems.

- **Forced retirement** (due to injury or deselection) is significantly more traumatic and destabilizing.

"I didn't choose to retire. It was injury. I felt like I lost everything. That's the reality for many." - SSI18 (Past player, Basketball)

"Forced retirement is a mental health issue. We need to treat it like one. Voluntary retirement is easier because it's chosen." - SSI14 (CEO, Basketball)

- Athletes often experience **grief, identity loss, and mental health challenges** when retirement is unplanned.

"Where guys get caught out is where they don't see it coming..." - SSI05 (past player, Coach, Cricket)

"It's not just injury, it's deselection... One's mental health support and dealing with that must come before you can actually go to career planning for transition." - SSI01 (Past player & Coach, AFL)

- **Voluntary retirement** allows for **more preparation**, smoother transitions, and better emotional outcomes.

"Voluntary retirement allows for dignity. Forced retirement often leads to emotional fallout. Clubs need to support both." - SSI12 (Past coach, AFL)

- The **lack of planning** is a major risk factor in both cases, but especially when retirement is sudden.

"I'm trying to prepare now, even though I'm still playing. I've seen what happens when you don't." - SSI16 (Current player, AFL)

"If athletes have put in the pre-planning work... it doesn't matter whether retirement is by choice or forced upon them. They are prepared and confident. Where people haven't... that's where the real rock bottom piece comes." - SSI02 (Consultant)

THEME 6: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CAREER TRANSITION SUPPORT

In terms of innovative models available for professional athletes the following was found.

- **Few truly innovative models** were identified; most support is still fragmented or underdeveloped.
- However, there were some promising examples:
- **ImproveMe portal** – self-paced, strengths-based career discovery

"ImproveMe and similar platforms are just the beginning. We need more athlete-led innovation." - SSI10 (Current Player, AFL)

- **Mentor programs** – structured alumni mentoring (e.g., in US college systems).

"I've done mentoring with retired players. It's helped me see what's possible beyond sport." - SSI16 Current Player, AFL

- **Career Practitioner Referral Network (AIS)** – accredited career professionals supporting Olympic/Paralympic athletes.

"The Career Practitioner Referral Network is world-first. It's accredited, professional, and scalable." - SSI15 (Olympian)

- **Flexible employment models** – part-time roles within clubs or partner organisations.

"Flexible employment within the club—where athletes can work in admin or community roles—is a great model." -SSI17 (Past Player, Olympian)

- **Peer-led workshops** – former athletes sharing transition experiences (e.g., PCA in UK cricket).

"We need more athlete-led initiatives. Who better to design transition programs than those who've lived it?" - SSI18 (Past Player, Basketball)

THEME 7: IDEAL SUPPORT DURING SPORTING CAREERS

Participants were asked to ponder what they believed to be the ideal mechanisms for supporting athletes during their careers.

The findings here emphasise the need for early intervention and awareness among younger athletes and highlights the psychological challenge athletes face when their sporting identity dominates their self-concept.

- **Start early:** Transition planning should begin at entry into elite sport.

"Players in the 22–23 and below age bracket don't necessarily even realise that they should be starting to think about their transition..." - SSI02 (Consultant)

"Preparation from the day that you enter the professional sport environment." SSI01 (Past player & Coach, AFL)

- **Mandate time** for career development in athlete schedules and CBAs.

"Mandating time in the schedule for career transition activities in player Collective Bargaining Agreements." - SSI04 (Past Player, Cricket /AFL)

- **Normalize dual careers:** Encourage education, work experience, and identity development alongside sport.

"Working out who they are outside of the game is the biggest challenge athletes face in their transition. It can be hard because at the same time they have to forge a career as an athlete." - SSI03 (Past player, AFL)

- **Leverage networks:** Clubs and associations should actively connect athletes with mentors, employers, and learning opportunities.

“The biggest advantage professional athletes have is their networks... People love to be connected to sport. So they need to make the most of their connections.” - SSI03 (Past player – AFL)

- **Hold stakeholders accountable:** Coaches, agents, and organisations must prioritise off-field development.

“It's one of the most scrutinised careers in terms of on field performance. There should be just as much scrutiny on what they're doing off the field as they are on it, there's a duty of care there that is still pretty sadly lacking ...” - SSI13 (MD, Own Business)

SUB THEME 7.1: Top 3 Interventions for Healthy Career Transitions

Overwhelmingly, the top three career transitions interventions are outlined below.

1. **Self-awareness and career self-assessment tools** – to help athletes understand their identity, values, and transferable skills.

“... self-awareness is one of the strongest attributes that someone can have that can lead to success.” - SSI08 (Past Player, Ice Hockey, USA)

2. **Mentoring and career coaching** – to provide guidance, accountability, and emotional support.

“Mentoring. Seeing the effectiveness of that with senior players.” - SSI12 (Past coach, AFL)

3. **Education and training opportunities** – to build qualifications and confidence for life after sport.

“Education right from the beginning is important.” - SSI03 (Past Player, AFL)

Other frequently cited interventions include:

- **Wellbeing and mental health support**

“... we don't have enough mental wellbeing support. ... ongoing health checks should be compulsory and even when retiring or finished playing, there should be some sort of element where the club continues to look after you, particularly if you've been injured throughout your career.” - SSI11 (Past Player. Mgt. Consultant, Rugby Union)

- **Financial literacy and planning**

“... there has to be some financial planning on the adjustment period ... they've had such a bad track record of guys making a lot of money and then being bankrupt within like a year of retiring, they've really improved the rookie camps that they do now. A huge portion of that is financial awareness and planning.” - SSI08 (Ice Hockey Player, USA)

- **Long-term transition plans**

“... planning long term transition plans will come more from better self-awareness to tools and then the strategy plus the training. So does planning long term transition plans will come more from better self-awareness to tools and then the strategy plus the training.” - SSI09 (Past coach, Cricket)

- **Access to real-world work experience**

“I have been with the same insurance broker (during my career), so it's like an internship that turned into employment. Consistency of being involved with them. So, you build a relationship rather than just a learning opportunity. Work placement and experience opportunities are the one of the most important things.” - SSI10 (Current player, AFL)

SUB THEME 7.2: Resources Needed

A comprehensive list of resources was presented by participants in terms of what is needed to support career transitions.

- **Time:** Athletes need protected time for career development.
- **Qualified professionals:** Career coaches, psychologists, financial advisors.
- **Funding:** For education, internships, and transition programs.
- **Networks and partnerships:** With businesses, universities, and alumni.
- **Technology platforms:** For self-paced learning and career exploration.
- **Cultural change:** A shift in mindset across sport to value off-field development equally.

These findings demonstrate how proactive planning can buffer the impact of unexpected career endings.

7. OUTCOME OF STUDY

Navigating the Career Journey of Professional Athletes: Contexts, Challenges, and Support Needs

Over the past few decades, the landscape of career support for professional athletes has undergone a significant transformation. Historically, such support was either minimal or entirely absent, particularly 20 to 30 years ago when sport was not widely recognised as a full-time profession. Career services, if available, were often reactive stepping in during moments of crisis rather than proactively guiding athletes through their professional journey. Moreover, the availability and quality of support varied greatly across sports and organisations, lacking a consistent or holistic approach.

In contrast, the current environment reflects a more structured and intentional effort to support athletes beyond their playing careers. Today's career support offerings include a mix of digital and interpersonal resources: online platforms with assessments, career matching tools, and curated content like TED Talks and podcasts; personalised coaching, mentoring, and counselling; and group workshops focused on personal branding, social media, and presentation skills. Sports such as AFL and cricket have led the way with career action plans and access to dedicated advisors, while university settings now feature performance lifestyle mentors. Internationally, programs like the UK's Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA) and Australia's AIS Career Practitioner Referral Network exemplify best practice in structured career support.

Despite these advancements, athletes continue to face profound challenges during career transitions. The most pressing issue is the identity crisis—a deep sense of loss as athletes grapple with leaving behind the identity that has defined them. This often leads to mental health struggles, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Many athletes also lack self-awareness, failing to recognise the transferable skills they've developed through sport. Financial stress, time constraints during their playing careers, and limited life experience—especially among younger athletes—further complicates the transition. Environmental factors, such as the level of support provided by their sport or club, also plays a critical role.

To address these challenges, participants in the study identified three key areas of support that are most needed:

1. Self-awareness and career self-assessment tools – Helping athletes understand their strengths, values, and transferable skills is foundational to successful transition.
2. Mentoring and career coaching – Providing ongoing guidance and accountability to help athletes navigate their options and build confidence.
3. Education, training, and occupational advice – Offering access to learning opportunities and clear career pathways beyond sport.

Additional supports frequently mentioned include long-term transition planning, mental health and wellbeing strategies, financial literacy, access to real-world work experience and fostering a sense of agency—empowering athletes to take ownership of their future.

Ultimately, the journey from professional sport to life beyond the game is complex and deeply personal. While progress has been made, continued investment in holistic, proactive, and athlete-centred career support is essential to ensure that athletes not only survive but thrive in their post-sport lives.

Supporting Athletes Through Career Transition: Insights, Challenges, and Innovations

The journey from elite sport to life beyond competition is deeply personal and often complex. The insights that emerged from the study participants (athletes, past athletes, coaches, and career practitioners) reveal a nuanced understanding of the factors that shape successful career transitions, highlighting differences across sporting contexts, the emotional impact of retirement, and the evolving landscape of support services.

Career transitions vary significantly between athletes in individual and team sports. Team sport athletes often benefit from built-in support structures—shared experiences, peer comparisons, and cultural norms that encourage career planning. In contrast, individual athletes may demonstrate greater self-reliance and resilience but often lack the communal support that team environments provide. These differences are not solely sport-specific; they are shaped by the organisational context and the presence (or absence) of formal support systems. Notably, part-time athletes in sports like AFLW and

netball often juggle dual careers, which can ease the transition by fostering broader identity development and career readiness.

The nature of retirement—whether voluntary or forced—has a profound impact on an athlete’s transition experience. Voluntary retirement typically allows for preparation, emotional readiness, and smoother transitions. In contrast, forced retirement due to injury or deselection can be traumatic, triggering grief, identity loss, and mental health challenges. Regardless of the circumstances, the absence of career planning is a critical risk factor.

While most career support remains fragmented, a few innovative models are emerging. These include:

- ImproveMe portal – a self-paced, strengths-based career discovery platform.
- Structured mentoring programs – such as alumni mentoring in US college systems.
- AIS Career Practitioner Referral Network – connecting Olympic and Paralympic athletes with accredited professionals.
- Flexible employment models – part-time roles within clubs or partner organisations.
- Peer-led workshops – where former athletes share their transition experiences (e.g., PCA in UK cricket).

These initiatives represent promising steps toward more holistic and athlete-centred support systems.

Participants emphasised the importance of early intervention, suggesting that transition planning should begin at the point of entry into elite sport. Career development must be embedded into athlete schedules and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), with dual careers normalised and actively encouraged. Clubs and associations should leverage their networks to connect athletes with mentors, employers, and learning opportunities, while stakeholders—including coaches and agents—must be held accountable for prioritising off-field development.

To support these interventions, athletes need:

- Protected time for career development.

- Access to qualified professionals – including career coaches, psychologists, and financial advisors.
- Funding for education, internships, and transition programs.
- Networks and partnerships with businesses, universities, and alumni.
- Technology platforms for self-paced learning and career exploration.
- Cultural change – a shift in mindset across sport to value off-field development equally.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore innovative organisational approaches to supporting professional athletes in their career transitions. Drawing on a mixed-methods case study design, the research addressed three key questions:

RQ1: What current career support services exist for professional athletes in Australia?

The findings reveal a growing ecosystem of career support services for athletes, ranging from structured programs offered by national sporting bodies (e.g., AIS, AFLPA, RLPA) to private platforms like ImproveMe. These services include career coaching, mentoring, education and training pathways, financial literacy, and wellbeing support. However, the landscape remains fragmented, with significant variation across sports, organisations, and individual experiences. The shift from reactive to proactive support—particularly through embedded career planning and dual career pathways—marks a positive evolution in professional athlete support.

RQ2: Who are the key stakeholders in the context of supporting professional athletes in post-career transitions?

The study identified a diverse network of stakeholders including sporting organisations, player associations, coaches, career practitioners, educational institutions, and private providers. Importantly, the role of mentors—especially former athletes—and career development

professionals emerged as critical. The findings underscore the need for cross-sector collaboration and shared responsibility, as highlighted in the literature (Stambulova et al., 2009; Richardson & McKenna, 2020). Collective bargaining agreements and institutional mandates are essential to ensure accountability and consistency in support delivery.

RQ3: What organisational-based innovations are assisting professional athletes to build career capital and support/navigate career transitions?

Innovative approaches include self-paced digital platforms (e.g., ImproveMe), structured mentoring programs, flexible employment models, and accredited career practitioner networks. These initiatives reflect a shift toward athlete-centred, strengths-based models of support. The integration of career development into athlete pathways aligns with contemporary career theories such as the protean (Hall, 1996) and boundaryless career models (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which emphasise adaptability, self-direction, and lifelong learning.

The findings also resonate with Stambulova's (2003) Sport Career Transition Model, which views transition as a continuous process shaped by personal, social, and environmental factors. Schlossberg's (1981) Human Adaptation to Transition model further reinforces the importance of individual perception, coping resources, and contextual support. These theoretical frameworks provide a robust lens through which to interpret the lived experiences of athletes navigating career change.

In conclusion, successful career transitions for professional athletes require a holistic, proactive, and personalised approach. Early intervention, embedded career planning, and multi-stakeholder collaboration are key. The study contributes to the development of a framework for supporting athletes across the career life cycle and offers practical insights for sporting organisations, educators, and career professionals.

8.1 Recommendations

The study has generated a set of nine Recommendations detailed in the Executive Summary:

Recommendation 1: Embed Transition Planning Early

Recommendation 2: Build Self-Awareness and Agency

Recommendation 3: Provide Mentoring and Career Coaching

Recommendation 4: Expand Education and Training Opportunities

Recommendation 5: Facilitate Work Experience and Networking

Recommendation 6: Prioritise Mental Health and Wellbeing

Recommendation 7: Improve Financial Literacy and Planning

Recommendation 8: Strengthen Institutional Commitment

Recommendation 9: Promote Cross-Sector Collaboration

8.2 Implications and Limitations

The findings will have practical implications for professional athletes (at different stages of the career life cycle), professional sporting organizations, Players Associations, Coaches and Coaching staff, career professionals and educators and potentially, to contribute to the further development of framework for supporting professional athletes in career transition.

The sample size of the online questionnaire was relatively small and due to this no statistical significance can be drawn from this. It was highly explorative and did provide some insights into participant's interaction with the ImproveMe website. The small sample size also reflects the number of ImproveMe client users who are or were professional athletes. The predominance of male respondents reflects the professional athletic background of the Founder who himself was a professional athlete and was motivated to establish the organization in response to his own experiences and experiences of those around him in his particular sport (AFL). The predominantly male sample for the semi structured interviews also reflects the background of the Founder and his existing networks in professional sport.

9. REFERENCES

- AFL Players' Association. (2024). *Insights and impact report: Edition 4*. AFLPA. <https://www.aflplayers.com.au>
- Akkermans, J., Schaufeli, W.B., Brenninkmeijer, V., & Blonk, R.W.B. (2013) The role of career competencies in the Job Demands — Resources model, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 83(3), 356-366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.06.011>
- Al Ariss, A., Cascio, W. F., & Paauwe, J. (2014). Talent Management: Current Theories and Future Research Directions. *Journal of World Business*, 49, 173-179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2013.11.001>
- Alfermann, D., & Stambulova, N. (2007). Career transitions and career termination. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 712–733). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118270011.ch32>
- Aquilina, D. (2013). A Study of the Relationship Between Elite Athletes' Educational Development and Sporting Performance. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30(4), 374–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2013.765723>
- Arthur, M. B. (1994). The Boundaryless Career: A New Perspective for Organizational Inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 295–306. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2488428>

- Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). A Career Lexicon for the 21st Century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 28–39.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4165351>
- Australian Institute of Sport. (n.d.). *Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program*. Australian Sports Commission.
<https://www.ais.gov.au/athlete-wellbeing/ace>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273-285.
- Blinde, E. M., & Greendorfer, S. L. (1985). Retirement from intercollegiate sport: Theoretical and empirical considerations. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 2(2), 101–110. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2.2.101>
- Blinde, E. M., & Stratta, T. M. (1992). The “sport career death” of college athletes: Involuntary and unanticipated sport exits. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 15(1), 3–20.
- Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2013). Living, resisting, and playing the part of athlete: Narrative tensions in elite sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14(5), 701–708. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2013.05.003>
- Gordon, S., Lavalley, D., & Grove, R. J. (2006). Career assistance program interventions in sport. In D. Hackfort, J. L. Duda, & R. Lidor (Eds.), *Handbook of research in applied sport and exercise psychology: International perspectives* (pp. 235–246). Fitness Information Technology.

- Guetterman T. C., Feters M. D. (2018). Two methodological approaches to the integration of mixed methods and case study designs: A systematic review. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(7), 900–918. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218772641>
- Hall, D. T. (1996). Protean careers of the 21st century. *Academy of management perspectives*, 10(4), 8-16.
- Kadlcik, J., & Flemr, L. (2008). Athletic career termination model in the Czech Republic: A qualitative exploration. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 43(3), 251–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690208098544>
- King, T., Rosenberg, M., Braham, R., Ferguson, R., & Dawson, B. (2013). Life after the game--injury profile of past elite Australian football players. *Journal of science and medicine in sport*, 16(4), 302–306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2012.09.003>
- Knights, S.; Sherry, E.; Ruddock-Hudson, M.; O'Halloran, P. (2019). The end of a professional sport career: ensuring a positive transition. *Journal of Sport Management*, 33, 518–529. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2019-0023>
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: a prospective study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 8(1), (2007) 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.03.003>
- Louis, M. R. (1980). Career Transitions: Varieties and Commonalities. *The Academy of Management Review*, 5(3), 329–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/257108>

Microsoft. (2025). Copilot (GPT-4) [Large Language Model].

<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>

Richardson, J., & McKenna, S. (2020). An exploration of career sustainability in and after professional sport. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.06.002>

Rosenberg, E. (1981). Gerontological theory and athletic retirement. In S. L. Greendorfer & A. Yiannakis (Eds.), *Sociology of sport: Diverse perspectives* (pp. 118–126). Leisure Press.

Ryba, T. V., Ronkainen, N. J., & Selänne, H. (2015). Elite athletic career as a context for life design. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 88, 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.02.002>

Savickas, M. L. (2015). Career counseling paradigms: Guiding, developing, and designing.

Schwab, K. (2016) The Fourth Industrial Revolution. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/about/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-by-klaus-schwab/>

Stambulova, N. (2010). Counseling athletes in career transitions: The five-step career planning strategy. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 1(2), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2010.528829>

Stambulova, N., Alfermann, D., Statler, T., & Côté, J. (2009). ISSP Position stand: Career development and transitions of athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 7(4), 395–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2009.9671916>

Sullivan, S. E., & Al Ariss, A. (2021). Making sense of different perspectives on career transitions: A review and agenda for future research. *Human*

Resource Management Review, 31(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100727>

Sullivan, S. E., & Baruch, Y. (2009). Advances in Career Theory and Research: A Critical Review and Agenda for Future Exploration. *Journal of Management*, 35(6), 1542-1571.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309350082> (Original work published 2009)

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2-18.
doi:10.1177/001100008100900202.

Swain, D. A., (1991). Withdrawal from sport and Schlossberg's Model of Transitions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8, 152-160.

Taylor, J., & Lavalley, D. (2009). Career transition among athletes: Is there life after sports? In J. M. Williams (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance* (6th ed., pp. 541–562). McGraw-Hill, Boston.

Taylor, J., & Ogilvie, B. C. (1994). A conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 6(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413209408406462>

Wylleman, P., & Lavalley, D. (2004). A Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 503–523). Fitness Information Technology.

10. APPENDICES

AI Use Disclosure Statement

This report includes content generated with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot (Microsoft, 2025), an AI-powered tool based on OpenAI's GPT-4 architecture. Copilot was used to support tasks such as assisting with qualitative data analysis in Phase III, summarisation, drafting, and refining of text. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the authors to ensure accuracy, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. The use of AI did not replace human judgment or original analysis.

Prompts used to assist in crafting the response to the three Research Questions in the Conclusion were:

1. Address the three Research Questions (RQs)
2. Weave relevant literature and theory back into the narrative

Appendix A

Ethics Approval



Professor Roslyn Cameron

E-mail: ethics@torrens.edu.au

14/04/2022

Dear Roslyn

Ethics Application 0152 Optimising Career Transitions

Torrens University Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval Notification

Thank you for submitting the ethics application for the above research project. This project was reviewed by the HREC at the 8 December 2021 meeting, and subsequently by the HREC Executive out of session.

I am pleased to advise you that this research project has been granted ethical approval.

In this project the methodology and participating site(s) are as stated in the application.

Note: If additional sites are engaged prior to the commencement of, or during the research project, the Chief Investigator is required to notify the Human Research Ethics Office. Notification of withdrawn sites should also be provided to the Human Research Ethics Office in a timely fashion.

The approved documents include:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Letter of support	Shannon Bymes	26/10/2021	V1.0
Letter of support	Brent Lehmann	27/10/2021	V1.0
Letter of support	Lisa Woolf	27/10/2021	V1.0
Letter of support	Claire King	28/10/2021	V1.0
Letter of support	Lesley Mackenzie	03/11/2021	V1.0
Letter of support	Tom Lonergan	15/11/2021	V1.0
Other project related documentation	Re ETHICS APPLICATION - DUE MONDAY 15th Nov - QUERIES	15/11/2021	1
Signature	Ros Cameron Signature	15/11/2021	1
Letter of support	Ethics Application Letter_ImproveMe	20/11/2021	1
Cover letter	ImproveMe Cover letter_Online Survey	24/11/2021	1
Cover letter	ImproveMe PICF interview_Cover letter	24/11/2021	1
Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form PICF	ImproveMe PICF interview_13_12_21	13/12/2021	3
Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form PICF	ImproveMe PICF Online Survey_13_12_21	13/12/2021	3
Curriculum vitae CV	Cameron RA CV Nov 2021	13/12/2021	2
Curriculum vitae CV	ChristineEdwards Resume September 2020	13/12/2021	2
Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form PICF	ImproveMe PICF interview_23_11_21_Revised 17 Jan 22	17/01/2022	4
Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form PICF	ImproveMe PICF Online Survey_23_11_21_Revised 17 Jan 22	17/01/2022	4
Protocol	ImproveMe Research Proposal_13_04_22	13/04/2022	3

Approval of this project from the Torrens Australia University HREC is valid from 14/04/2022 for a period of three (3) years, subject to the following conditions being met:

- The Chief Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Office of any event that requires an amendment to the originally approved ethics application. An Ethics Amendment Request should be completed and any change must be approved prior to implementation.

- The Chief Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Office of any unexpected adverse or serious events that may impact participant welfare of the conduct of the project.
- The Chief Investigator will provide an annual progress/ final report to the Human Research Ethics Office for submission to the HREC and notify the HREC when the project is completed at all sites.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Office if the project is discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Office of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above and will submit any associated required documentation. An Ethics Extension Request should be completed and any change to the approval period must be approved prior to implementation.
- The Chief Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Office of their inability to continue as Chief Investigator including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

A copy of this ethics approval letter must be submitted by all site Chief Investigators to the relevant individual at each participating institution in a timely manner to enable the institution to authorise the commencement of the project at its site/s.

[This letter constitutes ethics approval only.](#) This project cannot proceed at any site until separate research governance authorisation has been obtained from the CEO or delegate of the institution under whose auspices the research will be conducted at that site.

Should you have any queries about this review by the HREC please contact the Human Research Ethics Office. The Torrens University Australia HREC wishes you every success in your research.

Kind regards

Suzette Rawady, Human Research Ethics Officer

on behalf of

Torrens University Australia HREC

The Torrens University Australia HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 \(updated 2018\)](#)

Appendix B

Phase II Questionnaire Instrument

OPTIMISING CAREER TRANSITIONS

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in the above research project as you were / are a professional athlete and have also been a user of ImproveMe.com.au. The project has been approved by the Torrens University Australia Human Research Ethics Committee #0152.

The aim of this project is to identify:

- career support services that currently exist for adults in Australia
- how the onset of the 4th Industrial Revolution and associated changing nature of work and the global pandemic induced disruption is impacting on adults' ability to successfully navigate career transitions
- the industry-based innovations assisting adults to build career capital and support career transitions.

The expected benefits of this project are:

Practical implications for adults (at different stages of the career life cycle), career professionals and educators and potentially, to contribute to the further development of framework for supporting adults in career transition.

Your participation in this project will involve:

Participating in a questionnaire of approximately 10-15 minutes, to be conducted on-line. The information collected as part of this research project may be disseminated through public statements or publications, including assignments and theses, reports, conference presentations and referred journal articles. Data will be aggregated and summarised before being reported. Participants cannot be identified as individuals as the questionnaire is anonymous.

Participants can access the results of the project via a published Summary of Research Report available on the ImproveMe.com.au website.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You should feel no pressure or compulsion of any kind to participate. If you change your mind about participating, you are free to withdraw at any time during the research project without providing an explanation.

I consent to undertaking this questionnaire

Yes

No – SKIP LOGIC TO END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

ImproveMe Career Transition Services Questionnaire

A: Demographics

A1 Consent

A2. What is your gender?

Drop Menu

- *Male*
- *Female*
- *Non-Binary*
- *Prefer not to answer*

A2. What is your age?

Drop menu of Age Ranges

A4. What best describes your current employment status?

Drop Menu

- *Employed (full time / part time / casual / contractor)*
- *Currently unemployed*
- *University student / graduate*
- *Secondary school student*
- *Returning to work*
- *Self employed*
- *Other please specify*

A5. What is your highest level of education you have completed?

Drop Menu

- *Secondary high school*
- *Vocational Education and Training - Certificate*
- *Vocational Education and Training - Diploma*
- *Vocational Education and Training - Advanced Diploma*
- *Associate degree*
- *Bachelor's degree*
- *Bachelor's degree (Honours)*

- Graduate Certificate
- Graduate Diploma
- Master’s Degree
- Doctoral Degree

A6. In what sport were you/are you a professional athlete? OPEN

B: CAREER TRANSITION INFORMATION AND SERVICES

B7. With respect to career development, how important to you is it to receive help with each of the following?

	Very Important	Important	Not Sure	Not Important	Very Unimportant
Assessment to understand your skills, values, and interests					
Career planning advice					
Occupations and job market choices					
Listings of volunteering and internship opportunities					
Career information accessible face to face at an office					
Career information accessible online					
Career coaching one-on-one, delivered face-to-face					
Career coaching one-on-one, delivered online					
Other, please specify					

B8. Have you gone onto to study further (further education and/or training) after your experience with ImproveMe?

Yes No

C: CAREER TRANSITIONS**C9. Have you experienced or currently experiencing a major career transition?**

Drop Menu

- *Yes, currently experiencing a major career transition*
- *Yes, have experienced a major career transition in the past*
- *No, not experienced a major career transition **Skip Logic to end of questionnaire***

C10. Was the career transition you experienced/experiencing forced or voluntary?

Drop Menu

- *Forced*
- *Voluntary*
- *Other please specify*

[Taylor & Lavalley \(2010\)](#)**C11. Did you or are you suffering any forms of career transition stress?**

Tick all those that apply

Drop Menu

- Adjustment difficulties
- Occupational problems
- Financial problems
- Family/ social problems
- Wellbeing/ mental health/stress
- Exhaustion
- Health complaints
- Other, please specify

[Taylor & Lavalley \(2010\)](#)**C12. How important/helpful were or would be the following be in assisting you to cope and adapt to a major career transition?**

- Assistance with coping strategies
- Social support
- Pre-retirement planning
- Further education and training options
- Mentoring
- Other, please specify OPEN

[Stambulova, \(2003\)](#)**C13. How would you characterise the effect of the career transition?**

Positive OR negative

[Schlossberg \(1981\) and Stambulova, \(2003\)](#)

C14. How would you characterize the source of the career transition?

SOURCE

Internal decision OR External decision

[Schlossberg \(1981\)](#)

C15. How would you characterize the timing of the career transition?

TIMING

On-time – expected at this time

Off-time – earlier than expected

Off time – later than expected

[Schlossberg \(1981\)](#)

C16. How would you characterize the onset of the career transition?

ONSET

Gradual OR Sudden

[Schlossberg \(1981\)](#)

C17. How would you characterize the duration of the career transition?

DURATION

Permanent Or temporary OR Uncertain

[Schlossberg \(1981\)](#)

D. IMPROVEME CAREER TRANSITION SERVICES

Think about your experiences with ImproveMe as you respond to the following questions.

D18 In the last 12 months, how often have you engaged with ImproveMe, accessed its resources (including online), or used its services?

Drop menu

Many times (6+) A few times (2-5) Once Not at all

D19. What did you gain/ learn through the services offered by ImproveMe?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	NA
I learnt to explore, make career decisions and plan my career goals						

I learnt about current occupations and the job market						
I learnt about internships and / or education opportunities						
I learnt about potential employers and / or industries where my skills may be suited						
I gained self-knowledge and understanding in terms of my motivations and values						
Other, please specify						

D20. Please rate your satisfaction with the following:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Did not use /seek
Career information in the ImproveMe website / portal					
Extent to which ImproveMe career information is organised and user friendly					
Career information provided to me directly by a representative of ImproveMe					
Extent to which staff are available to help and find career information					
Extent to which staff are knowledgeable and helpful to you					
Extent to which the ImproveMe met / is meeting your career transition needs					

D21. Have you used the ImproveMe StrengthsPlus Assessment?

Yes or NO *Skip Logic to end of questionnaire Question D25*

ImproveMe - StrengthsPlus Assessment

Think about your experiences with the ImproveMe StrengthsPlus Assessment as you respond to the following questions.

D22. To what extent do you agree/ disagree with the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The online assessment was easy to use and navigate					
I found the peer assessment feature useful					
The StrengthsPlus assessment was useful in identifying my strengths					
The StrengthsPlus assessment was useful in identifying my blind spots in my own abilities					
I received my assessment results quickly via email					

ImproveMe StrengthsPlus Portal

Think about your experiences with the ImproveMe StrengthsPlus Portal as you respond to the following questions.

D23. Did you access the personalised online portal for self-paced learning and development opportunities and how useful were they?

Please indicate the level of usefulness of the following features of the portal:

	Very Useful	Useful	Unsure	Not Useful	Very Useless
Learning more about my customized key strengths					
Identifying career choices					
Career preparation material					
Self-paced learning to develop my skills					
Clarity in career decisions					
Confidence to take action in my career					

D24. What resources and services could have made your career transition experience more positive?

OPEN ENDED

D25. What advice would you give someone who is experiencing a major career transition?

OPEN ENDED

D26. is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix C

Phase II Semi Structured Interview Questions

OPTIMISING CAREER TRANSITIONS

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND

Q1: Please tell us about history and role with your current organisation?

Q2: Historically what have you known to be the career support services offered to professional athletes whilst they are in their respective athletic career?

Q3: What types of career support services are currently offered by your organisation?

CAREER TRANSITION ISSUES

Q4a: What are the big issues affecting professional athletes as they prepare to transition out of their sporting career?

Q4b: What career transition support do you feel is most needed for professional athletes?
(Perhaps consider the Top 3 in terms of need)

These may cover the following:

- Career advice
- Career planning
- Long term transition plans
- Self-awareness, career self-assessment tools & strategies
- Education, training & occupational information and advice
- Feelings of agency (control)
- Well-being strategies
- Mentoring
- Career coaching
- Other please specify

Q5: How different, if at all, are these issues for individual sport people as compared to team sport professional athletes?

Q6: How different are these issues when retirement is forced (injury and or poor performance) as compared to voluntary/planned retirement?

Q7: Are you aware of any innovative approaches to supporting professional athletes as they transition out of their respective professional athlete careers?

Q8: In an ideal world what would you suggest could be done for professional athletes during their sporting careers to better prepare them for the transition out of that career?

Q9: What interventions would better support professional athletes in career transitions so they experience a healthy career transition and can improve their adaption and coping strategies?

Consider the following issues that may need to be addressed (perhaps consider the top 3 in terms of need):

- Adjustment difficulties
- Occupational problems
- Further education and training options
- Financial problems
- Family/ social problems
- Wellbeing/ mental health/stress
- Exhaustion
- Health complaints/issue

Q10: What sort of resources do they need to have access to in order to address these issues?

Q11: Is there anything else you would like to add?



**TORRENS
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA**

**Centre for
Organisational
Change and Agility**