



HenleyCentreHeadlightVision

Project 'Experience of Sport' Research Debrief

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Presentation Outline

- Introduction
 - Background
 - Objectives
 - Methodology & Sample
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 - Key dynamics to consider
 - Implications for defining ‘experience’
- The experience in sport – components
- ‘Achieving your potential’
 - Defining and breaking down ‘potential’
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- Conclusions and recommendations
 - Measuring the ‘good experience’ and potential
 - Areas for potential further investigation





Introduction

- BACKGROUND
- OBJECTIVES
- METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Understanding the experience, achieving *potential* and student retention

Sport England's SUSTAIN outcome has the objective of establishing the conditions for 'people **achieving their potential** and having a **great sporting experience**'. This is underpinned by three key requirements:

75% of participants satisfied/highly satisfied with those aspects of sport important to them

50% of participants satisfied they can achieve their full potential

A 25% reduction in the drop off rate at 16/18/21 in 10 key sports

Qualitative research was required to give insight into aspects of sport important to participants and help define what reaching potential means.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES – SPECIFICS

Understanding the experience, achieving *potential* and student retention

To understand the drivers to a **great sporting experience**; the meaning of **achieving potential**; triggers / barriers to dropping out

Components of the experience

- What defines the great experience: key drivers
 - How this varies by sport, set up and other demographics
 - Emotional and practical pointers
- What, correspondingly, constitutes the negative experience

Achieving your potential

- Reactions to the language / phrasing
 - What is understood by potential in consumer language
- What factors contribute to achieving potential: key drivers
- Any variation by sport, set up and other demographics

Dropping out

- Student expectations of participation beyond college
- Drivers to current participation and the 'experience'
- Thought starters on 'retention' and potential hooks



METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

Group discussions with Informal and Organised sports players

6 x 1.5 hour Qualitative discussions in
GREATER LONDON and LEEDS

	Segment	Sex	Location
1	Informal Sport Participants	Male 35-49	Greater London
2	Informal Sport Participants	Female 35-49	North
3	Organised Sport Participants	Male 18-35	Greater London
4	Organised Sport Participants	Female 18-35	Greater London
5	Students	Male	North
6	Students	Female	Greater London

All:

- Taken part in sport (min 30 mins / occasion) at least four times in the past 4 weeks (e.g. once a week). NB sport entailing effort enough to raise the breathing rate.
- *Vs recreational walking or cycling and walking and cycling just to get from place to place. Also any teaching, coaching or refereeing.*
- *Vs involvement limited solely to going to activity for fitness e.g. jogging, weights, workouts, aerobics.*



METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

Group discussions with Informal and Organised sports

Organised Sport participants

- Sample split: male vs female; region (South vs North)
- playing competitive sport / relating to **formal or semi-formal organised competitive leagues or systems** - at least once / month.
- All to have received tuition, been a member of a sports club or taken part in organised competition in the last four weeks
- a spread of: **specific sports** e.g. football, rugby, basketball, swimming; age: 18 – 35 and **SEG**: C1C2D(E)

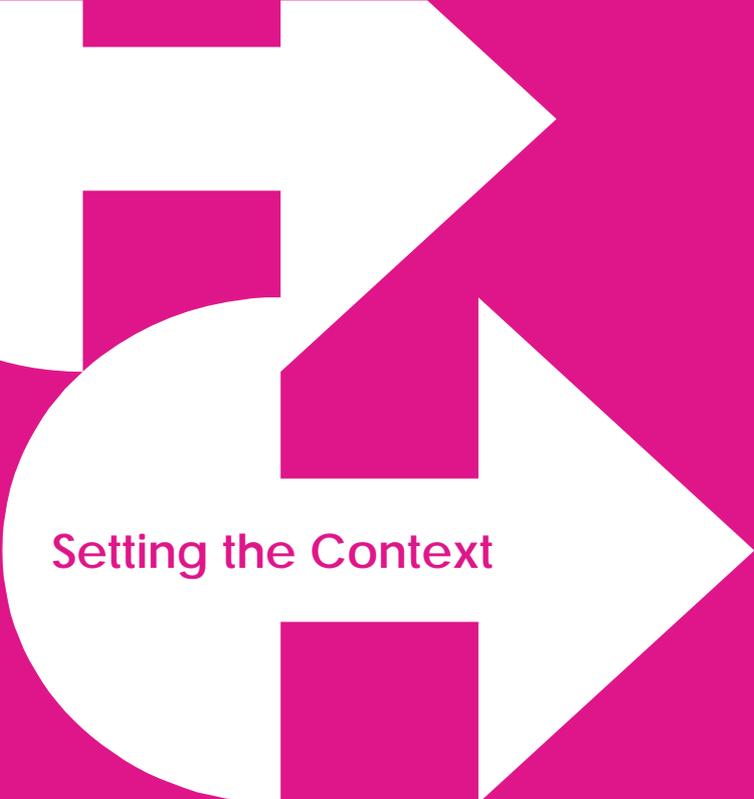
Informal Sport Participants

- Taking part in **'informal' sport** using local authority facilities - at least once per month. NB screening out people who just swim in Local Authority pools as their activity.
- MAY have received tuition, been a member of a sports club or taken part in organised competition in the last four weeks. (option to answer 'yes' or 'no' to this). Age, region, SEG as above.

Students 18-25

All **full or part time students** at institutions, with some access to sporting facilities, ensuring a spread of 'red brick', campus and 'new' universities and other FE institutions. Playing sport, **split 'informal' vs organised** - frequency as above.





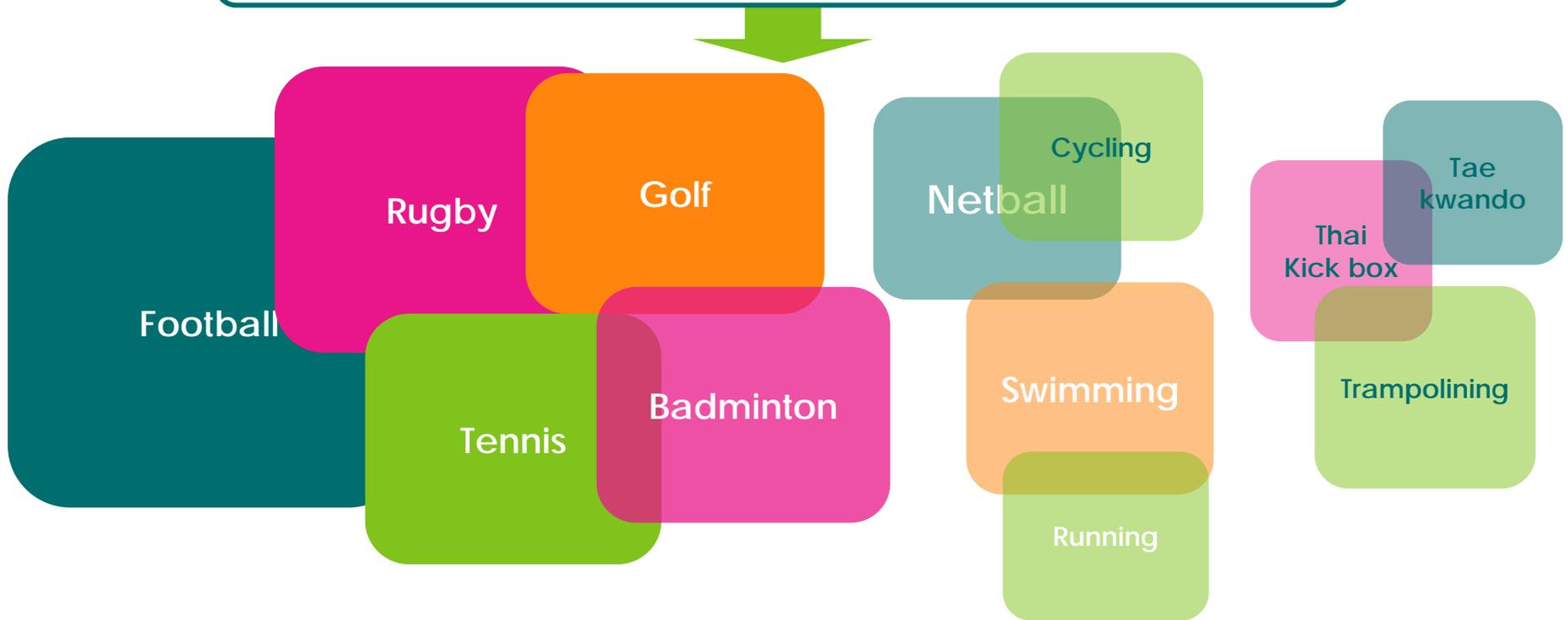
Setting the Context

- KEY DYNAMICS
- IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPERIENCE

KEY POINTS ON THE TARGET

A wide range of sports explored: from tennis to taekwando

From traditional and mainstream...to niche



Traditional, multi-participant sports dominate – most immediately in the form of Football , Rugby...Badminton etc

KEY POINTS ON THE TARGET

Despite this diversity, there is huge commonality of views across sports

Fundamental reasons for playing sport converge across sports i.e.



Why you play

Emotional and functional needs: the experience

What 'achieving' actually means.

What ensures you don't 'drop out'

Fundamentally, the components of the GOOD EXPERIENCE feel very consistent across sports. Differences between them are nuanced and a matter of weight – rather than fundamental.

KEY POINTS ON THE TARGET

Above all, this audience is fundamentally 'satisfied' with its experience

This feels in many ways a natural consequence of the fact that they are *continuing* to participate

Enjoying their experiences
- knowing their limits and few issues with 'access'

Voting with their feet when faced with bad experiences: teams, facilities, centres

Continuing to play
- with only occasional frustrations around playing sport

As such, it is important to note that satisfied existing customers – the 'converted' – often already feel that they are enjoying the right 'conditions'. As such, perceptions of what makes a GOOD EXPERIENCE tend to centre on emotional and subjective issues, rather than on facilities and tangibles. The conditions are already right.



KEY POINTS ON THE TARGET

Indeed none are overtly dissatisfied with their experience

*"I can't say I'm not happy
– I only have time for so
many evenings anyway"
M, Informal, 30-49*

*"If the changing rooms
are revolting you just
don't go there any more
– why would you?"
F, Organised, 18-35*

*"At college we are lucky –
there are plenty of
facilities. And free!"
F, Student*

*"Once upon a time I
used to play football on
Hackney Marshes but
no more - it was just
plain nasty"
M, Organised, 18-35*

As such, some sense that going forward there may be a case for exploring the views of the recently SPORT LAPSED or SPORT AVERSE – within the confines permitted of a customer retention exercise!

KEY DYNAMICS

While there is much unity though, some key differentiators are worth noting

These have a bearing on the weight / intensity of components in the GOOD EXPERIENCE



These are explored in detail below.

KEY DYNAMICS

A key difference is how SOCIAL and how FACILITY-DEPENDENT the sport is

Sports quite obviously differ markedly on this point

'Solo' vs Team sports...

Solo sports have little SOCIAL element to them
e.g. running, cycling, martial arts vs rugby, football, etc

'Facility-heavy' vs 'Facilities-Light / Free'...

FACILITIES can be integral (*trampoline*), transient (*football*) or non-existent (*running*).
They're most salient around wet vs dry sports.

Quite obviously the role of SOCIAL/SOCIABLE component and of FACILITIES / INFRASTRUCTURE hence varies according to sport types.



KEY DYNAMICS

Moreover SOLO vs TEAM dynamic also has a bearing on 'achievement'

What you define as achievement varies according to who you are playing with – if anyone at all.

Team sports

Involving peers, external appraisal: your team supports you but also judges you. Performance is EXTERNAL as well as INTERNAL.

Solo sports

No immediate peers, so involving much more self-appraisal. Performance is overwhelmingly an INTERNAL concept.

All sports value 'performance'. But the nature of the sport - TEAM vs SOLO – has influence on the make-up of that ACHIEVEMENT.

KEY DYNAMICS

How ORGANISED vs INFORMAL sport is also affects emphasis

Unsurprisingly, ORGANISED players prove more committed to their sport and more formally COMPETITIVE about it:

Tending to be more *casual* about and progression and happy with level – competition and achievement less overt vs SOCIAL

Older territory and more typically – but by no means exclusively - female

More explicit goals and targets; more likely to be 'playing to win' seeking guidance and bettering the game

Tends to be younger, male territory

Informal

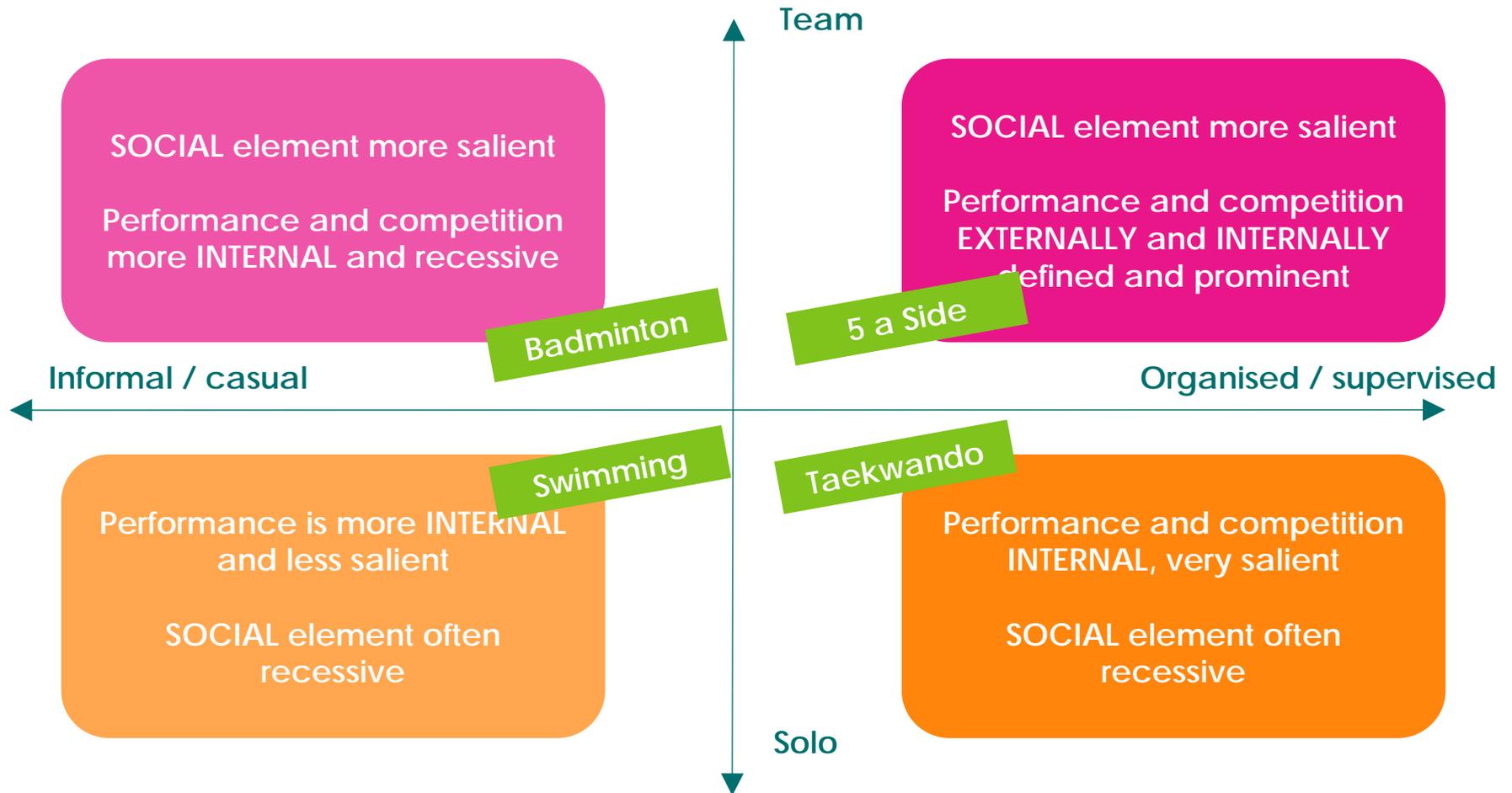
Organised

As such, 'PERFORMANCE' – while relevant for all - is a more overt component of EXPERIENCE for ORGANISED vs informal play.



SETTING THE CONTEXT: DYNAMICS SUMMARISED

In short, we can distribute characteristics as follows



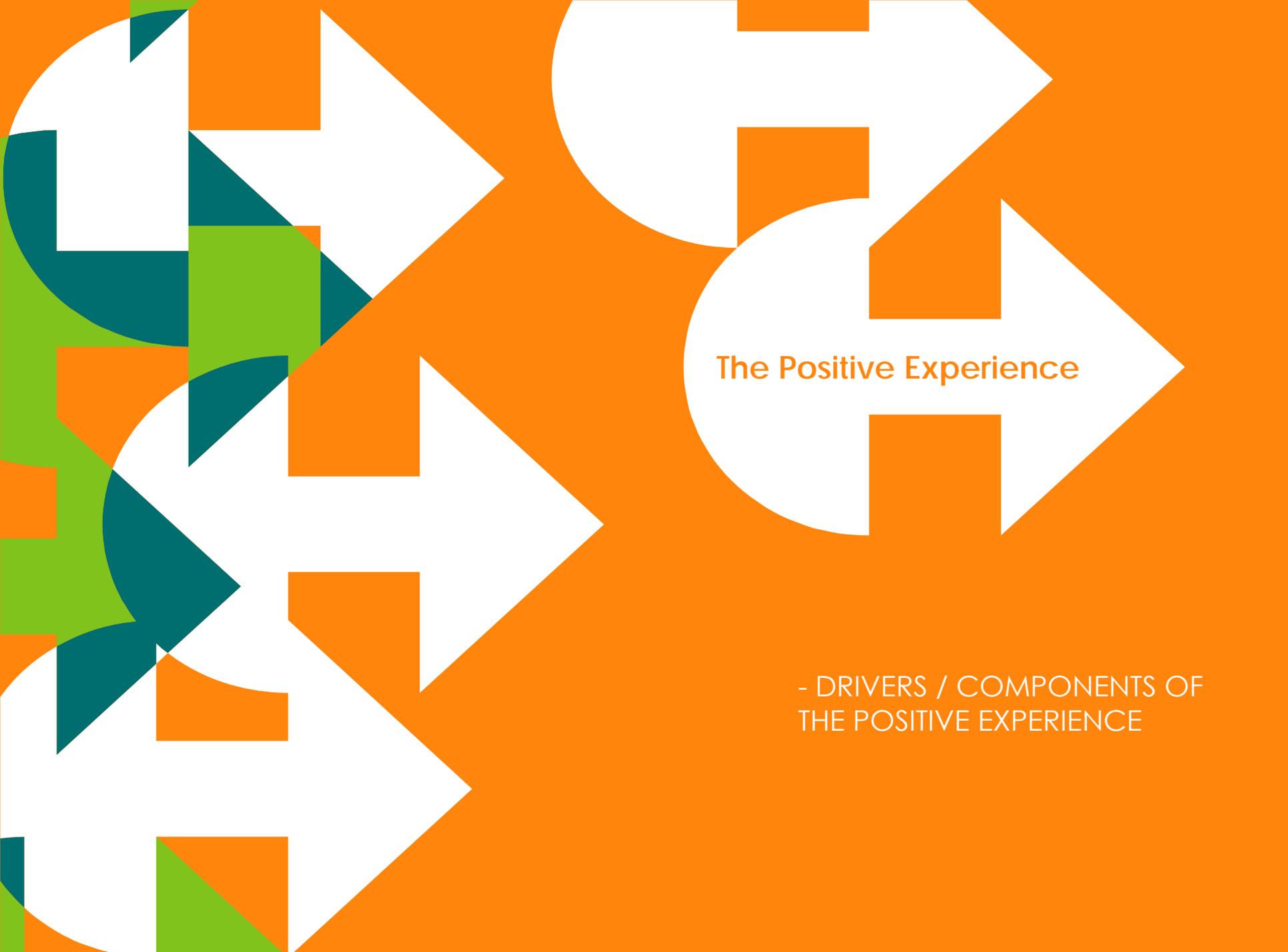
THE CONTEXT – IMPLICATIONS

So a number of points to note before exploring the sport EXPERIENCE

This audience is fundamentally 'satisfied' with their sporting experience, as existing participants - simply 'voting with their feet' in the past when conditions have not been satisfactory.

As such, their understanding what makes a satisfying / 'great' sport EXPERIENCE' is far less about conditions (facilities, infrastructure, access) than subjective, emotional factors (how you're playing, how you *feel*).

Despite wide differences in sports being played, there is a high level of consistency in terms of what makes that EXPERIENCE positive.

The background is a vibrant orange color. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of abstract geometric shapes in teal and light green. Several large, white, stylized arrows point to the right, overlapping each other and the teal/green shapes. One of these arrows is the largest and is positioned in the upper right quadrant, containing the text 'The Positive Experience'.

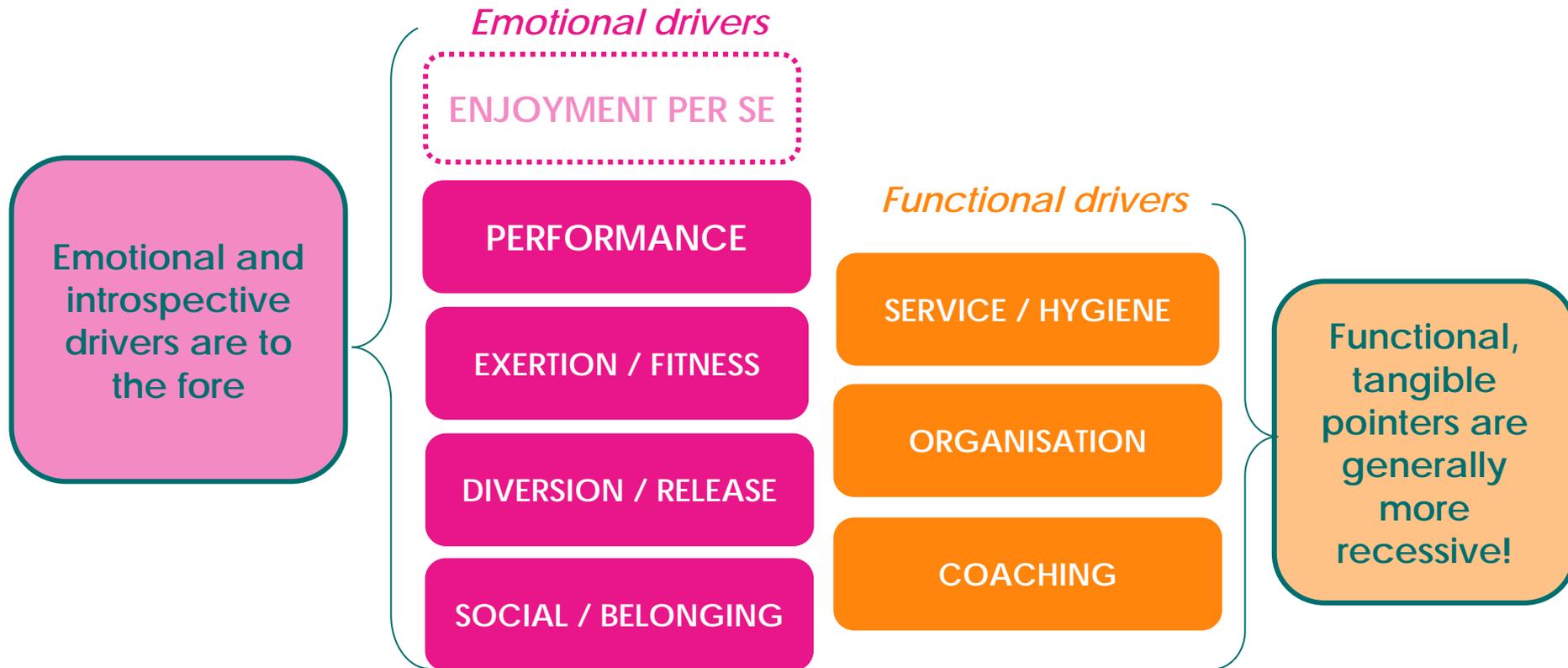
The Positive Experience

- DRIVERS / COMPONENTS OF
THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – OVERVIEW

Across all sports, we can speak of 4+ key components of satisfaction

The relative balance of these can vary between ORGANISED vs INFORMAL and SOLO VS TEAM



Each of these is considered in detailed below.

EMOTIONAL COMPONENTS



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – ENJOYMENT

'Enjoyment' is a rather circular but universal requirement!

'ENJOYING YOURSELF' is the prime criterion for all sustained activity – and sits at the apex of any list of components. This said, it merely answers a question with another!



So while 'circular', there's a sense that a successful sporting experience has to be enjoyable according to any consumer's own definition:
"All things considered, I enjoy playing the sport that I do".



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – ENJOYMENT

There's an obvious sense that no sport is sustainable without enjoyment.

"I would give up the moment it stop being a laugh"
M, Organised, 18-35

"It sounds like a total cliché but if you're not enjoying it you can't carry on"
M, Informal, 30-49

ENJOYMENT

"It's something you look forward in itself – not the winning – just the doing it"
F, Student

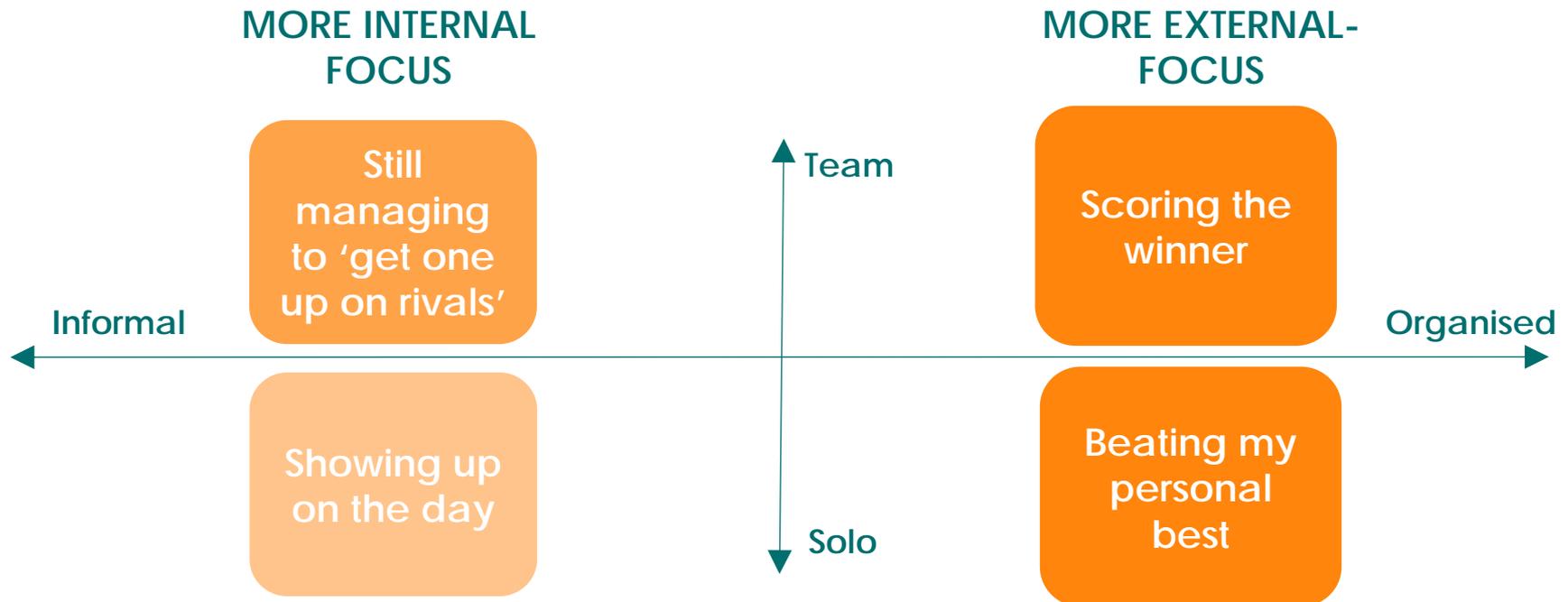
"I do a lot of sport because I enjoy it and if there wasn't sport I'd just be sitting on my rear"
M, Organised, 18-35

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – PERFORMANCE

The experience also requires a feeling of having 'performed' well

PERFORMANCE is the emotional satisfaction of having played 'well' and put in credible effort – *a.k.a. achieved potential*

Ranges from internal triumphs to the big match moments



Indeed this feels like the 'real world' equivalent of 'achieving your potential' – *discussed and broken down in detail below.*

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – PERFORMANCE

This is a constant preoccupation and is a wider concept than 'winning'

"Winning is great but winning easily is a bit of a downer in a strange way"
M, Organised, 18-35

"It's the feeling that you have done well – you might even feel a bit proud. A pat on the back" M, Informal, 30-49



"I have it on the driving range – you say to yourself, 'Ooh I did that'"
F, Organised, 18-35

"I'm actually like it when your muscles hurt a day later as you can think, I did it"
M, Informal, 30-49

So positive experiences require 'a sense of having performed well'.

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – PHYSICAL EXERTION / FITNESS

Physical exertion within the sport's scope is a further key component

This can take a range of forms

The MICRO:
Bursts of physical exertion for moves / shots / kicks / strikes / tackles / backhanders...etc.



The MACRO:
related to a prolonged play in general and the fact of having seen through a session.

AKA:
'Taking it out on the ball'
'Letting off steam'
'Busting the stress' 'Adrenaline rush'

AKA:
'Keeping fit' 'Staying healthy'
'Physically active'
'The healthy buzz afterwards'

The positive experience within our defined sports hence means *feeling* that you have *'put in some physical exertion'*



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – DIVERSION / ESCAPE

Feeling diverted – escapism – is the emotional bedfellow of exertion

This is the feeling of 'oblivion', 'simplicity', 'focus' - and the single-mindedness this fosters – from sport

Common to organised and informal sports

Sport is often an antidote or defence against the complexities of modern life e.g.

*"Getting away from it all"
"Taking your mind off things"*



Indeed for many, sport can feel like a virtual world where you *can shine, strike gold* and snatch moments of glory!

"Your moment of glory"

In practice then, positive experiences are very likely to involve feeling that *"I'm getting a break from the everyday things in life"*.



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – DIVERSION / ESCAPE

Feeling diverted – escapism and focussing on *other things*

"I have total concentration when I play – I'm not thinking about work or family or money"

M, Organised, 18-35

"When I am playing I'm not thinking about my essays. If I was sitting in the Union I would be"

M, Student

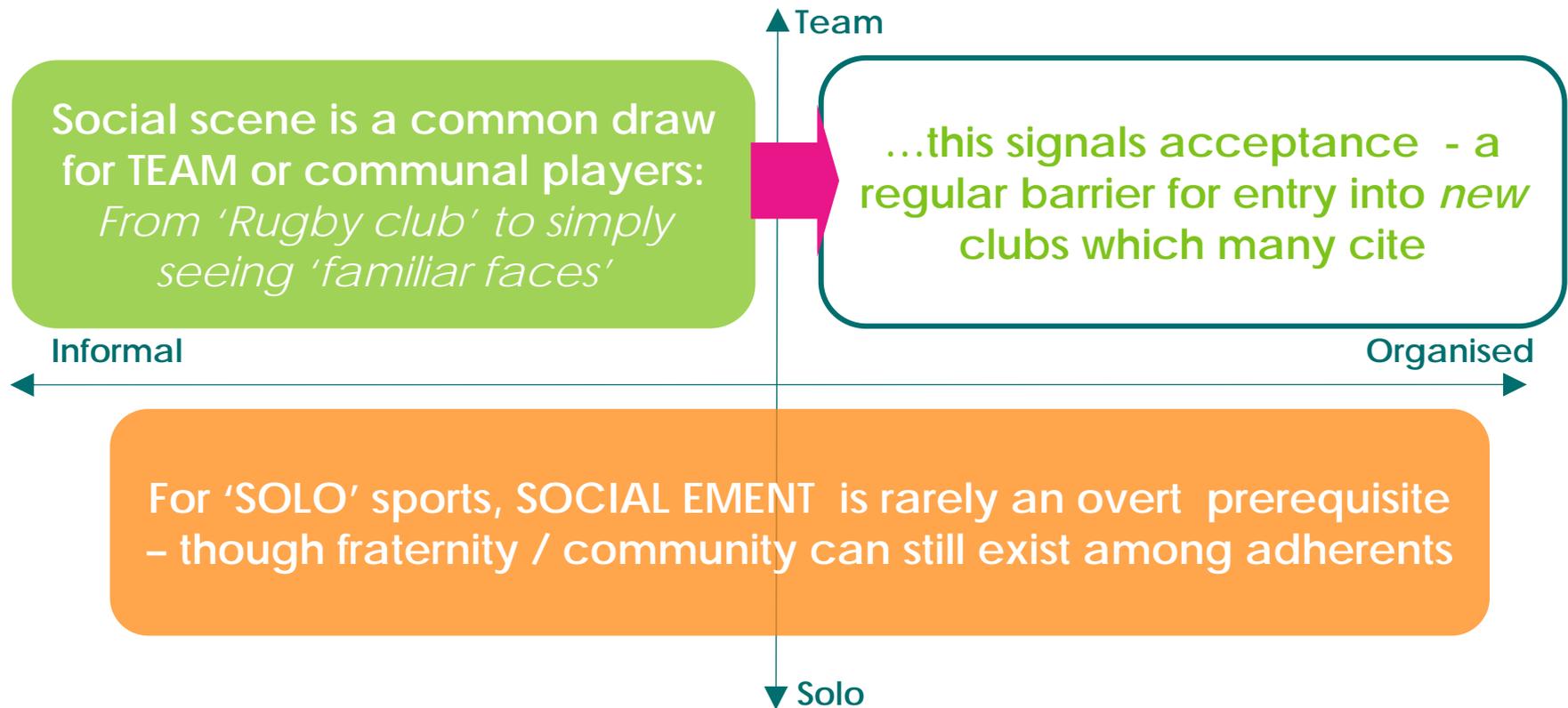
DIVERSION / ESCAPE

"It's 'me time'"
F, Organised, 18-35

"It's about the discipline – kids that play sport are more likely to respect each other"

M, Informal, 30-49

Lastly, sport's 'sociable' dimension is a recurring emotional component



'Feeling included or accepted' is hence an indicator of satisfaction with communal / team sorts – but less of an issue for SOLO sports

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – SOCIAL / BELONGING

The social dimension is an important trigger for team / communal sports

"When you play a sport you discover that you have other interests in common"

M, Informal, 30-49

"Some of these guys I've known since we were teenagers, and they've got kids now too"

M, Informal, 30-49



"It's a camaraderie that you get – there are lads beating each other up and then after the match you are best mates again"

M, Organised, 18-35

"For students the 'Social' is what it's ALL about. The Wednesday night after the Wednesday afternoon"

F, Student

TANGIBLE / FUNCTIONAL COMPONENTS



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – OVERVIEW

Since conditions are in place, tangible components are less of mind

The satisfying sport experience is a reality for this target

But 'functional' drivers emerge when we explore what can occasionally go 'wrong'

Functional drivers

SERVICE / HYGIENE

ORGANISATION

COACHING

In many ways these feel like 'hygiene factors' – without which a sporting target would simply 'walk away' after time.



THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – HYGIENE / SERVICE

(Poor) hygiene and customer service are often 'deal breakers'

More relevant for WET or
leisure centre-based sport
requiring shower / change



Netball

Swimming

Tennis

Badminton

....and more of a female issue

Less of a issue for MEN and
'muddy' sports



Football

Rugby

*....ritual 'grime' and ramshackle
conditions can form part of the
experience*

What does 'customer service' and hygiene embrace?

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – HYGIENE / SERVICE

In practice failure comes in a number of obvious areas

HYGIENE

- Showers
- Toilets
- Changing rooms
- Pool water

'CUSTOMER SERVICE'

- STAFF attitude
- STAFF knowledge of offer
- STAFF ability to use discretion

- Enforcement of booking periods i.e. ensuring customer gets the court for your allocated time

Being satisfied with service and hygiene of facilities is hence essential – especially in the WET / LEISURE CENTRE-based sports

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – HYGIENE / SERVICE

A very vocal area – though rarely experienced for long.

"Crook Log leisure centre is revolting - all that hair in the showers"

F, Organised, 18-35

"It's when you look in the pool and you check out the plaster collection – that's it, never again"

F, Organised, 18-35

SERVICE / HYGIENE

"There's her on reception at the leisure centre with the long nails – she's a right miserable cow. No recognition, nothing"

F, Organised, 18-35

"It shouldn't be the customer's job to tell punters that their time on court is up – you feel awkward"

M, Organised, 18-35

Good organisation / coordination is a feature of ORGANISED TEAM sports

Tends again only to be noticed when it's lacking

The sense of team members being COMMITTED and TRYING vs no-shows, half-hearted effort

COORDINATED 'team management' – *someone* in charge, arranging / booking / guiding the group

"There's nothing more depressing than when two or three lads are too hung over to be bothered"

M, Organised, 18-35

So for team sports, smooth running contributes to a good experience

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – COACHING

Lastly, coaching – where a need – can fall short

Tends to matter more to ORGANISED SOLO play – e.g. martial arts, tennis – where coaching is one-to-one and personable



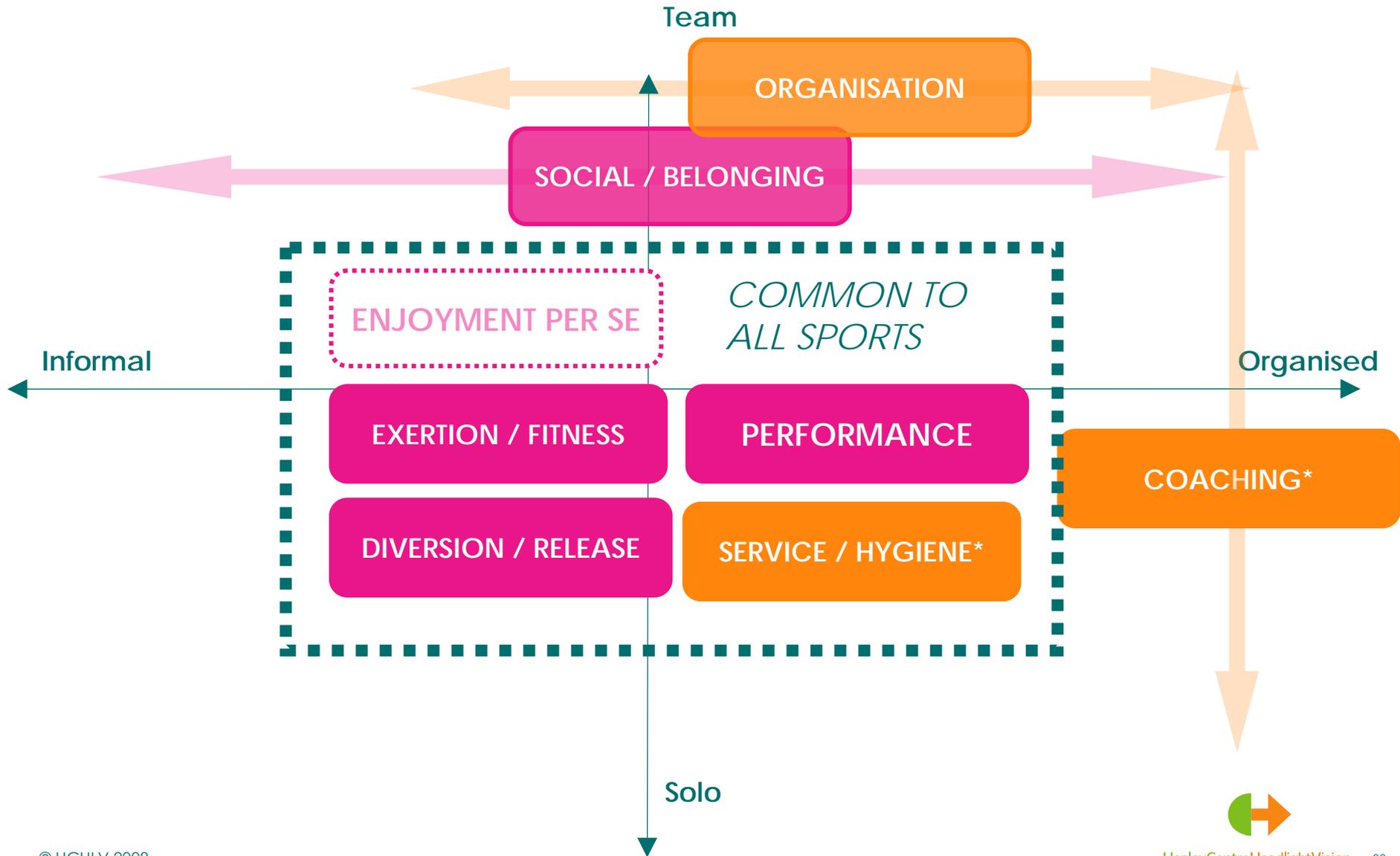
A coach who simply remembers individual players' abilities and 'your case'

...offering a sense of individual attention to your development – if so sought!

So satisfactory coaching – where relevant – is a minor contributor

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE – SUMMARY

In all there feel like 4 common components and 3 'outliers' in action





Achieving Potential

-KEY DYNAMICS
-IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPERIENCE

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL – OVERVIEW

'Achieving potential' struggles as expressed

Potential the word presents tonal and conceptual barriers

× Feels innately 'glass half empty' - echoing the downbeat language of school reports: 'COULD DO BETTER'

'POTENTIAL'

× POTENTIAL also feels unattainable beyond high level athletics – an ever moving targets that 'real people' can't hope to reach

...and implies reserves of talent and drive that many don't have time or will to tap further.

Projecting a world beyond the reach of even *this* active audience.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL – OVERVIEW

'Achieving potential' struggles as expressed

"Potential is infinite – anyone could 'potentially' be a gold medal winner if you give up work and only do sport"

M, Organised, 18-35

"Bettering yourself"

"Apparently Johnny Wilkinson is a bit emotionally stunted as his whole life has always been just Rugby and only Rugby. He's at his potential"

M, Organised, 18-35

"Feeling proud"

"It's not about potential – it's about doing the best for yourself in what you're playing - in the circumstances you are in"

M, Informal, 30-49

"Shining"

"You might have someone saying 'you've got a good swing – you could hit better than that' –that's sort of everyday 'potential'"

M, Organised, 18-35



ACHIEVING POTENTIAL – COMPONENTS

Rather, 'potential' is 'performing to (or beyond) your standards'

Largely self defined and internal - based on instinct and experience - a feeling for one's own capabilities



So besides coaching and inclusion, 'potential' is an internal idea.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL – COMPONENTS

'Achieving potential' is almost always self defined

"When you're playing your best to yourself you feel confident"
M, Informal, 30-49

"It's when your team mates pat you on the back and say 'well done'. Trying your hardest, doing your best"
M, Organised, 18-35

"You might need a coach or expert to know your standards – most of us know what our bodies are able to manage!"
F, Organised, 18-35

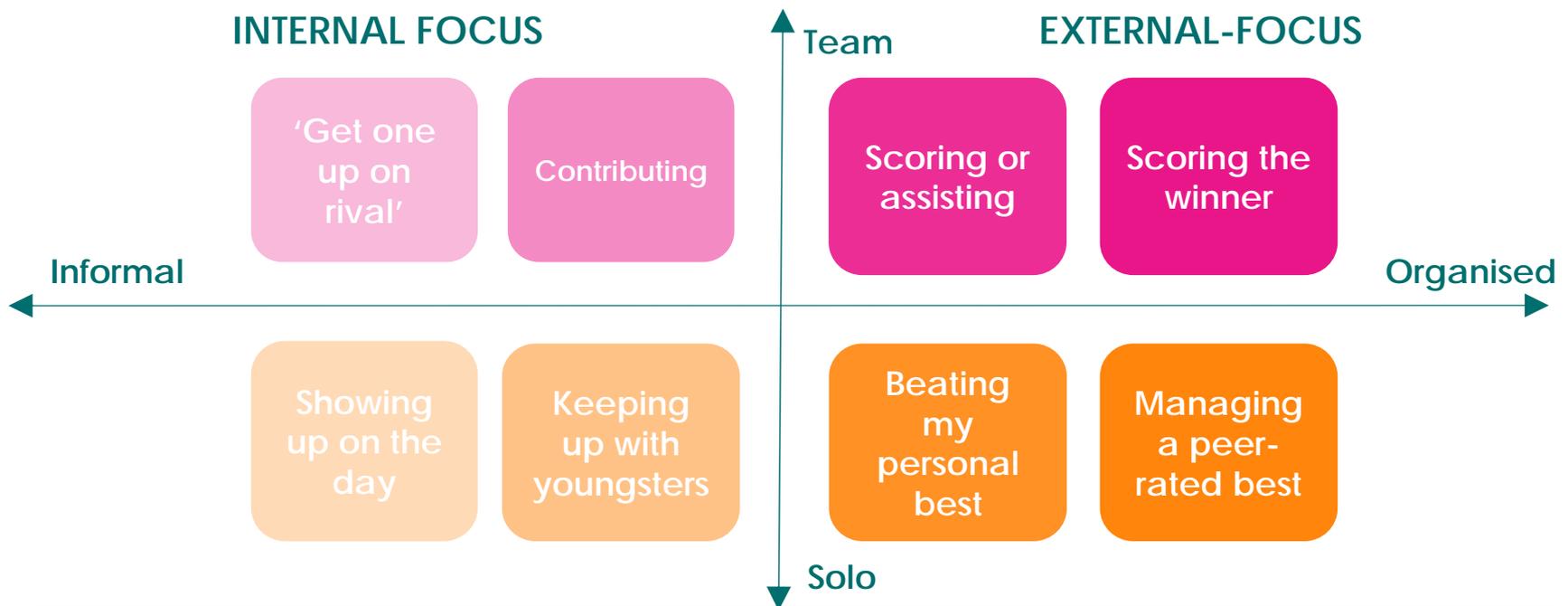
"It's the feeling that over time you have got better – better than you maybe were last year"
M, Organised, 18-35



ACHIEVING POTENTIAL – OVERVIEW

In practice, this ranges from private triumph to public heroics

Varying according to nature of play and peer group



In all, as sense of *'having performed to the standards I'm capable of'*.





Students and Sport

- EXPERIENCE
- EXPECTATIONS
- RETENTION

STUDENTS – OVERVIEW

Students echo the satisfaction and 'components' of working peers

This said, two components of the sport experience carry relatively greater weight than for non-students

SOCIAL / BELONGING

College sport is very closely intertwined with social activity...

SPORT IS A SOCIAL PROXY AND NETWORKER

DIVERSION / RELEASE

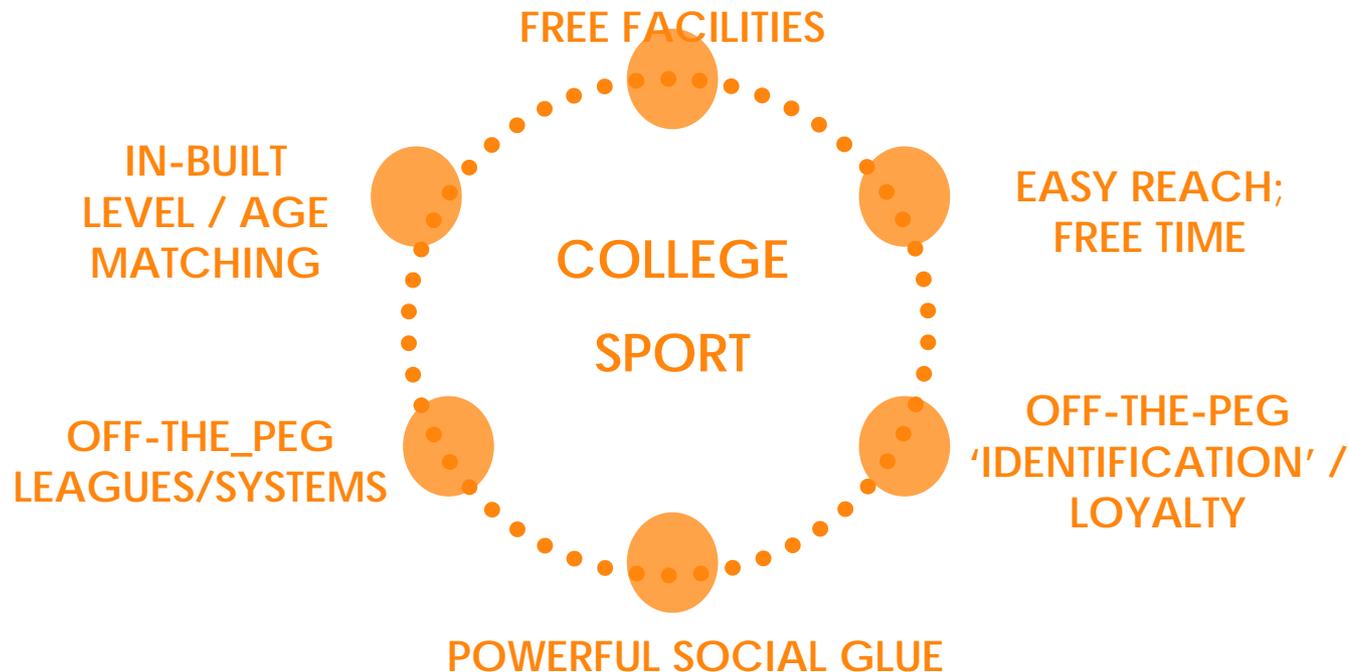
Studying is 'demanding' and lacks clear work / play boundaries – making real 'escape' all the harder

ESCAPE FROM ESSAYS AND WORK/PLAY LIMBO?

STUDENTS – EXPECTATIONS

All realise they are in *unusually* favourable conditions for sport

College is generally a hub holding together individual involvement sport by its unique sport-friendly conditions



These connections largely disintegrate in the working world

STUDENTS – EXPECTATIONS

So unsurprisingly, most expect some dropping off, post-college

Those supportive conditions tend to fall away
as the dispersed, 'time poor' working routine kicks in



A once accessible outlet suddenly feels a task for the *committed* only

STUDENTS – RETENTION

Ex-students who remained in sport are a useful source of insight

A combination of COMMUNICATION, CONTINUITY and WORK-FRIENDLY ACCESS helped their 'retention'

COMMUNICATION
AND OUTREACH FROM
NEW 'PROVIDERS'

- Knowing what's available locally
- **Openness and friendliness to new members**
- Transparency re standards of play / age etc...a.k.a. 'FIT'

CONTINUITY OF
STRUCTURES TO REACH
BEYOND COLLEGE

- Links or feeder arrangements with non-student networks / clubs
- **'Life' association or body membership**
- Running club on and off-campus – pre and post graduation

WORK-FRIENDLY
ACCESS

- **FROM WORK:** sponsorship / fostering of teams for cohesion/teamwork
- **FROM CLUBS:** encouraging 'time poor' participation e.g. *Dads' Leagues; Grad Leagues*

This feels like rich territory for further exploration.



STUDENTS – RETENTION

The challenges faced post-college

"The trouble with Vets' clubs is that some of them are proper old. If you knew what you were getting in for, it'd be easier."

M, Organised, 18-35

"At work they like it because it's good for the teamwork and the banter so they pay for us to be a team out of the social fund"

M, Organised, 18-35



"We went to one club and the girls were really frosty and 'them and us' so we looked around until we found one where they were friendly"

F, Organised, 18-35

"We carried on because my mate found another club in Hampton that took us all on together almost – so it's the same lads"

M, Organised, 18-35

The image features a vibrant, abstract background composed of overlapping geometric shapes in shades of orange, teal, and light green. The shapes include circles, triangles, and irregular polygons, creating a dynamic and layered visual effect. The overall composition is modern and energetic.

Conclusions

CONCLUSIONS

A satisfied audience: enjoying 'good experiences' and avoiding bad.

This audience is fundamentally 'satisfied' with their sporting experience, as existing participants - simply 'voting with their feet' in the past when conditions have not been satisfactory.

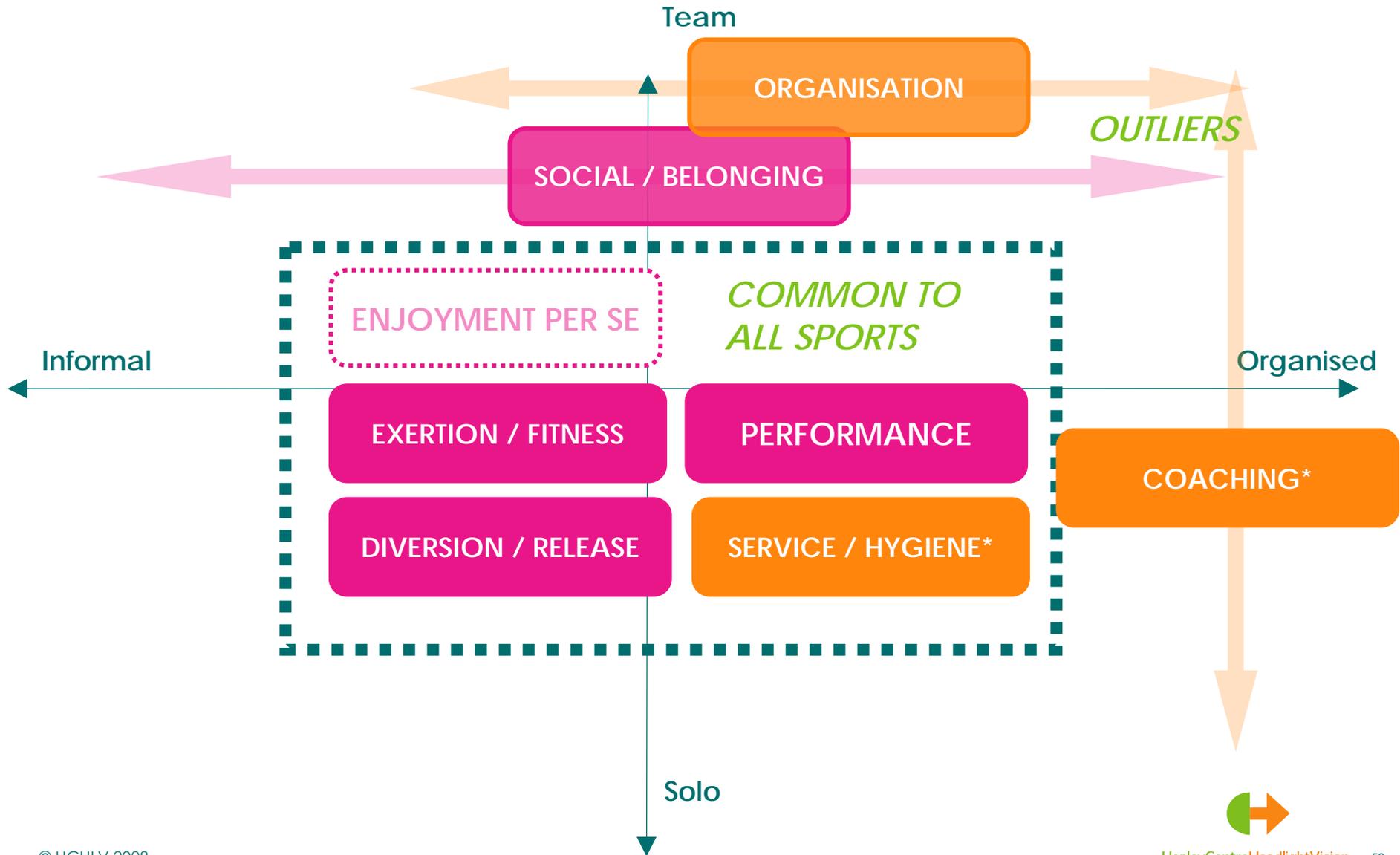


As such, their understanding of *what* makes a satisfying sporting EXPERIENCE is perhaps DISPROPORTIONATELY less about conditions (facilities, infrastructure, access) vs subjective, emotional factors.

Despite differences in sports being played, there is a high level of consistency across gender, frequency and sport. Differences are nuanced and about *outliers, beyond* the 'emotional' essentials.

CONCLUSIONS - THE GOOD EXPERIENCE

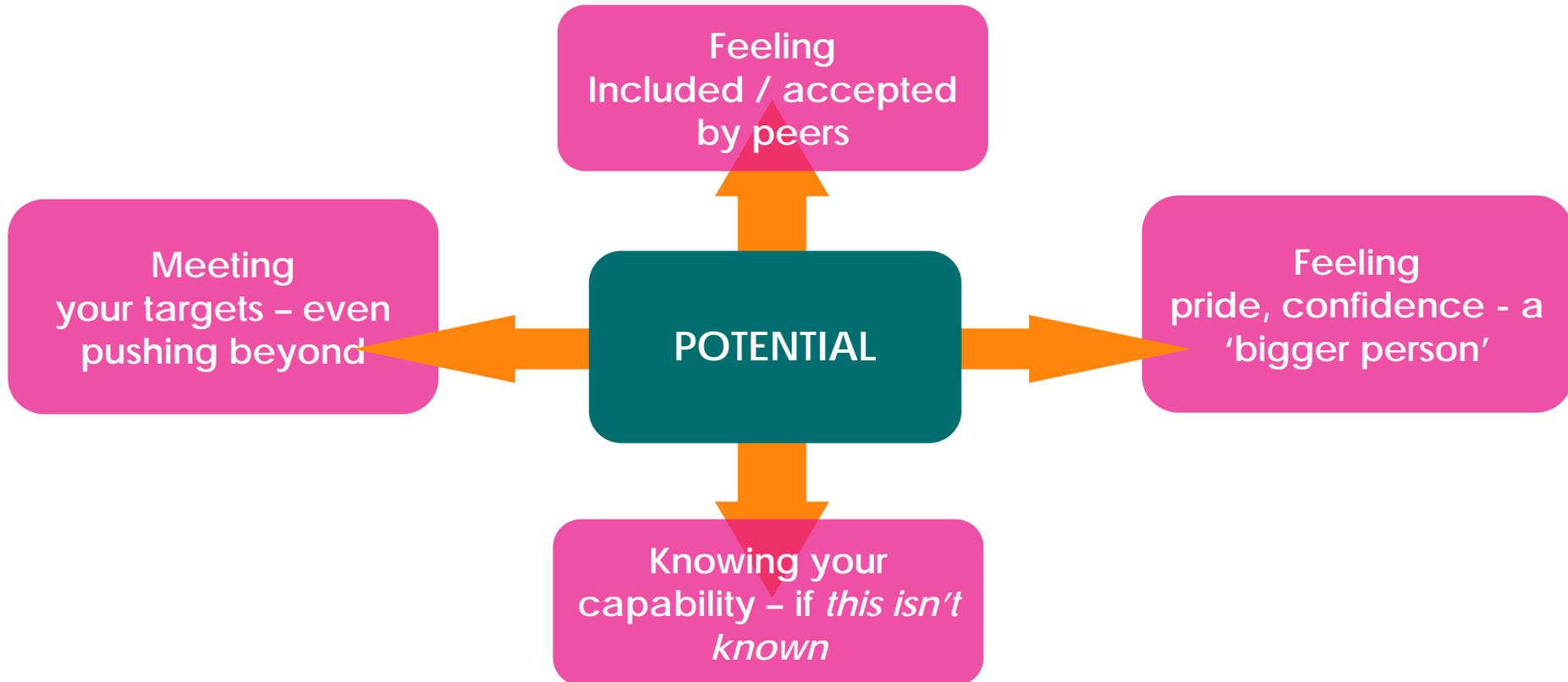
In all there feel like 4 common components and 3 'outliers' in action



CONCLUSIONS – POTENTIAL

'Potential' is 'performing to (or beyond) your standards'

A 'real life' tightening of the open-ended idea of 'potential'



'Playing to the standard you expect of yourself in your circumstances'

CONCLUSIONS

Students are in *unusually* favourable conditions for sport

These supportive conditions tend to fall away as the dispersed, 'time-poor' working life kicks in



A combination of COMMUNICATION, CONTINUITY and WORK-FRIENDLY ACCESS may address 'retention'



Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some 'thought starters' for criteria of 'satisfying experience'

PERFORMANCE

*"Feeling that you have performed to the standards you expect of yourself" – AKA **POTENTIAL***

EXERTION / FITNESS

"Feeling of having satisfying physical exertion"

DIVERSION / RELEASE

"Getting a break or release from everyday life"

SOCIAL / BELONGING

"Feeling included / accepted when playing" (TEAM ONLY)

SERVICE / HYGIENE

'Satisfied with the service & hygiene at any facilities I use'

ORGANISATION

"Satisfied with team organisation" (TEAM ONLY)

COACHING

'Satisfied with availability / quality of coaching if I need it'



RECOMMENDATIONS

The idea of 'achieving your potential' is best expressed otherwise

Better expressed perhaps as:

"Feeling that you have performed to the standards you expect of yourself"

Itself comprised of:

Meeting
or pushing beyond
your goals

Feeling
confident in your
play

Feeling
accepted by peers
(TEAM ONLY)

...and presupposing:

Knowing - within
reason - your
capability



RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, worth exploring potential triggers to retention among former students who have lapsed. Thought starters to explore:

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH FROM NEW 'PROVIDERS'

- Knowing what's available locally
- **Openness and friendliness to new members**
- Transparency re standards of play / age etc...a.k.a. 'FIT'

CONTINUITY OF STRUCTURES TO REACH BEYOND COLLEGE

- Links or feeder arrangements
- **'Life' association or body membership**
- Clubs autonomous of campus – allowing pre and post graduate membership

WORK-FRIENDLY ACCESS

- **FROM WORK:** sponsorship / fostering of teams for cohesion/teamwork
- **FROM CLUBS:** encouraging 'time poor' participation *e.g. Dads' Leagues; Grad Leagues*

This feels like rich territory for further exploration.



Creating better futures



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