

# Gibbs' Reflective Cycle: Adapting athlete mental skills workshops to firefighters

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## INTRODUCTION

- Historically, performance psychology researchers and practitioners have focused their attention on the use of mental skills training to facilitate the performance of sport populations (Brown & Fletcher, 2017).
- More recently, researchers and practitioners alike have identified a growing demand for mental skills training within tactical organizations such as the military (Raabe, 2021) and the fire service (Raabe, 2021; Weir, 2018).
- The call for mental skills training within the fire service is not surprising as firefighters, like elite athletes, must utilize mental skills, depend on effective leadership (Wheldon, 2019), and perform well amid significant work-related stress (Payne & Kinman, 2019; Sawhney et al., 2018).
- Similarly, firefighters share many of the same mental performance characteristics as athletes (Gnacinski et al., 2015; Meyer, 2018).
- Given the known overlap in mental skills use between tactical and sport populations, coupled with a growing demand in mental skills training in non-sport populations, a need exists to systematically and effectively adapt athlete workshops to non-athlete populations.

## PURPOSE

- The purpose of the current project was to use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) to demonstrate how workshops delivered to an athlete population can be adapted for delivery to a firefighter population.

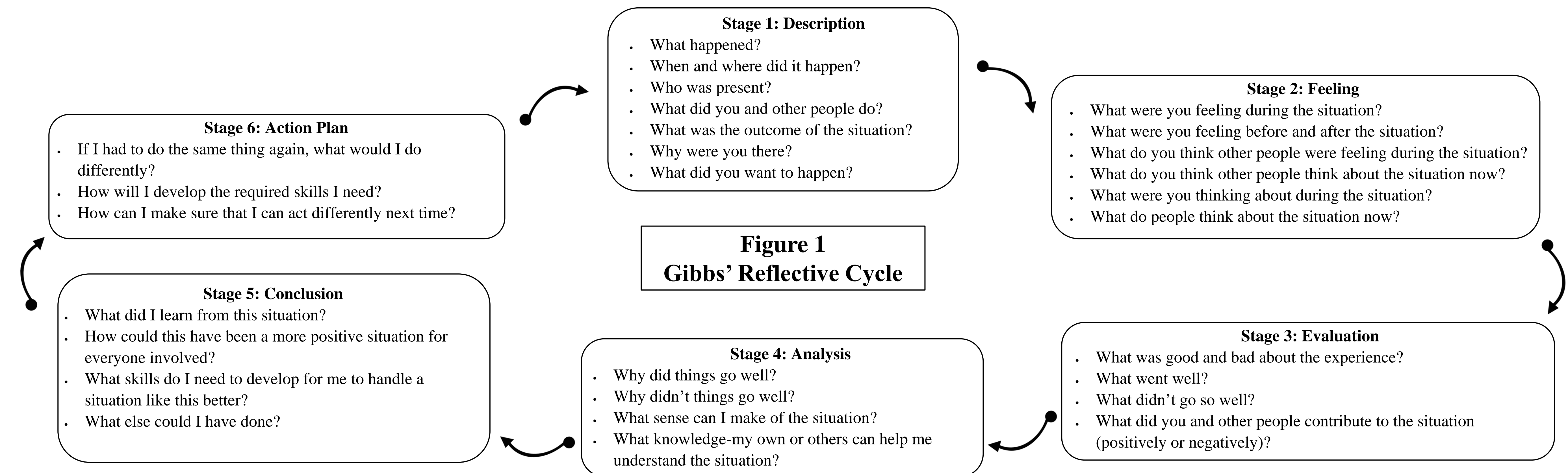
## METHODS

### Participants

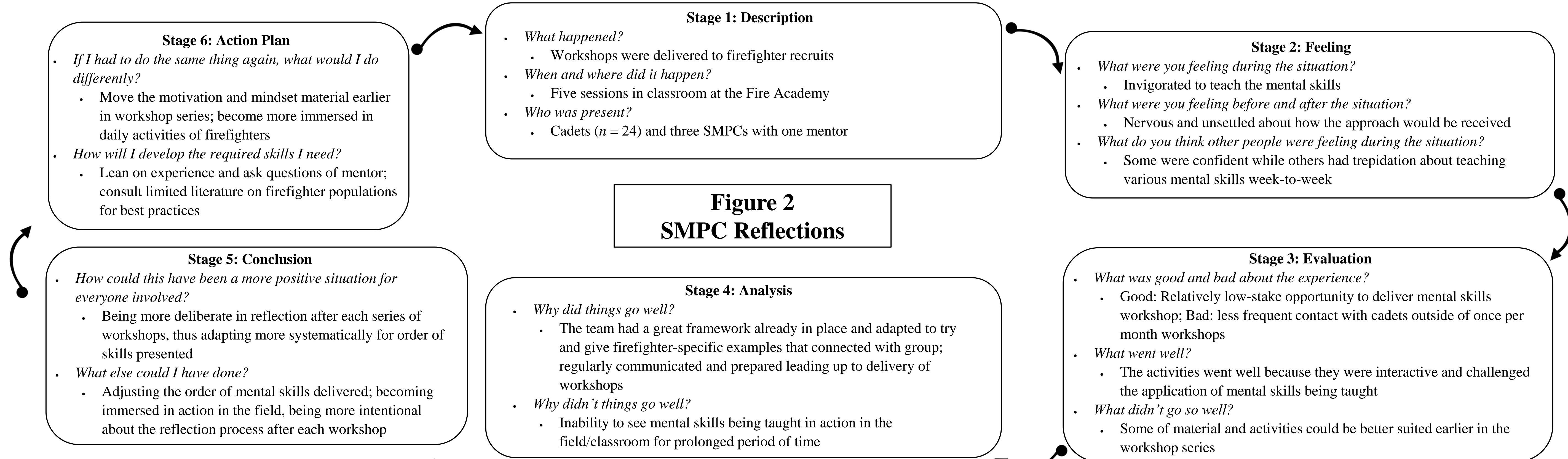
- Student Mental Performance Consultants (SMPCs;  $n = 4$ ) delivered workshops as part of a training curriculum to three firefighter recruit cohorts from a Midwestern fire department over a period of three years.

### Procedure

- Informed by previous scholarly work in various domains (e.g., education [Markkanen et al., 2020]; medicine [Tawanwongrsi & Phenwan, 2019]; sport psychology [Whitehead et al., 2016]), Gibbs' Reflective Cycle was used to deliberately and critically evaluate the delivery of mental training workshops within a Fire Academy curriculum. See Figure 1 for Gibbs' Cycle and guiding questions.
- SMPCs used Gibbs' guiding questions to reflect on workshop delivery and modifications. See Figure 2 for abbreviated reflections drawn by SMPCs.



## RESULTS



## DISCUSSION

- Gibbs' Reflective Cycle was used intermittently and non-systematically throughout the three-year process of adapting workshops initially delivered to athletes into workshops delivered to firefighter recruits.
- Two primary themes emerged when SMPCs engaged in the reflective practice outlined by Gibbs during the adaptation and delivery of workshops.
  - Engagement with the firefighters in both the workshop setting and the fireground enabled SMPCs to better understand their daily activities and training, and concurrently conveyed SMPC investment in the development of the whole firefighter.
  - Modification of the order in which mental skills were discussed (i.e., aligned with the Fire Academy training calendar) enhanced workshop activities and application to fireground where recruits were learning new skills that are high stakes in many ways.

### Implications for professional practice

- When adapting workshops to new populations, practitioners should have ongoing communication with stakeholders about desired deliverables and the contextual factors that need to be considered in designing and delivering the workshops.
- Gibbs' Reflective Cycle should be used deliberately and proactively between iterations of a workshop to different client groups and within a workshop series to the same client group. A purposeful approach to reflection will improve workshop delivery, and effectiveness of the product as a whole.