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2 **Enhancing Role Clarity in Youth Football:**  
3 **Applying the 5Cs to Role Descriptions by Position**  
4

5 **Accepted Manuscript**  
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8 Berglind, & Kristjánsdóttir. Hafrún. (2025). Enhancing Role Clarity in Youth Football: Applying  
9 the 5Cs to Role Descriptions by Position. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. Advance online  
10 publication. <https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2024-0070>.  
11

12 **Abstract**

13 Coaches acknowledge the significance of psychological skills but often struggle to strategically  
14 implement them into training sessions. This study, grounded in pragmatic ontology and  
15 constructive epistemology, aimed to develop a method based on Harwood's (2008) 5Cs framework  
16 to help coaches articulate how players should demonstrate psychological skills through behaviours  
17 on the field. A collaborative process ensured both practical relevance and theoretical rigour. In  
18 phase one, eight professional coaches and one academic expert collaborated with the researchers  
19 in a focus group to design psychological role descriptions for seven playing positions. Players were  
20 expected to exhibit a range of behaviours, each linked to a C-related attribute. In phase two,  
21 individual interviews (90-120 min) with each participant added depth to the role descriptions. In  
22 phase three, a thematic analysis produced seven psychological role descriptions, each containing  
23 12-18 behaviours. Examples include goalkeepers displaying Commitment by bravely entering  
24 physical encounters and forwards showing Confidence by taking shots when the opportunity  
25 arises. Perhaps due to cultural reasons, coaches most frequently emphasised attributes related to  
26 Control and Confidence. The method and the role descriptions can be valuable tools to enhance  
27 coaching efficacy by helping coaches frame, communicate, and deliver their expectations more  
28 efficiently through a shared framework.  
29

30 *Keywords: football, psychological skills training, role clarity, coach efficacy, 5Cs, coaching, collaboration, role*  
31 *descriptions, mental skills, co-design*  
32

33 Research indicates that football coaches recognise the significance of psychological skills (PS) for  
34 athletic success (Mills et al., 2012; Fuhre et al., 2022). They also perceive themselves as crucial to  
35 their players' personal growth and psychosocial development (Nash et al., 2011). Although many  
36 of them express interest in nurturing these aspects (Williams & Kendall, 2007; Brink et al., 2018),  
37 a considerable disparity exists between acknowledging the importance of PS development and  
38 their actual integration into training sessions (Arthur et al., 2019). This underscores the necessity  
39 for evidence-based tools and frameworks to assist coaches in effectively implementing

40 psychological skills training (PST), narrowing the gap between perceived importance and practical  
41 application in football. In modern football, performance analysis (PA) serves as a critical tool,  
42 helping coaches understand and enhance both training and match performance, including by  
43 effectively communicating key attributes to the players (Cullinane et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the  
44 existing PA literature has focused extensively on physical and tactical attributes and less on  
45 contextual factors, including how coaches can analyse, set, and communicate their expectations of  
46 psychological performance to their players (Mackenzie & Cushion, 2013; Sarmiento et al., 2018).  
47 Consequently, coaches may be less equipped to address psychological attributes in games and  
48 training sessions compared to tactical and physical ones. Further research is needed into  
49 behaviours during matches that are associated with important psychological attributes of football  
50 players. This includes defining the roles of players in terms of these attributes and defining the  
51 associated behaviours, developing to analyse these, and integrating these variables and tools into  
52 preparation for competition.

53         Roles are a set of prescriptions defining behaviours required of persons occupying certain  
54 positions. As the typical “role sender” in a team, coaches must assume responsibility for  
55 communicating clearly and consistently what they expect from their athletes (Eys et al., 2005).  
56 They are also responsible for deliberately teaching those skills. Role efficacy under conditions of  
57 high role clarity positively predicts the level of performance and reduces uncertainty about  
58 individuals’ sense of performance (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Bandura, 1997; Bray & Bradley, 2000;  
59 López et al., 2015). While role clarity is a crucial aspect of team building in organisational  
60 development, it has been underutilised in sports (Rovio et al., 2010). Athletes report greater  
61 acceptance of responsibilities if given clear and consistent information (Benson et al., 2013), and  
62 there is a strong positive association between socialisation tactics and cohesion, with role clarity as  
63 the mediating factor (Leo et al., 2020). Such clarity positively affects cohesion and confidence in  
64 solving situations during competition (Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Chow & Feltz, 2007). Meanwhile,

65 role ambiguity and role conflict contribute to greater tension and lower commitment and  
66 satisfaction (Bray et al., 2005; González-Ponce et al., 2022).

67 This alignment of roles and responsibilities emphasises the critical influence of coaching  
68 expertise, which is developed through deliberate practice, experience, and education, ultimately  
69 contributing to coaching efficacy as coaches work to optimise athlete performance. Coaching  
70 efficacy is “the extent to which coaches believe they can affect the learning and performance of  
71 their athletes,” as described by Feltz et al. (1999, p. 765). Expert coaches gain proficiency through  
72 accumulated experience and exhibit the ability to separate the important from the unimportant  
73 (Bell, 1997). Skills and knowledge acquired through trial and error can complement what coaches  
74 learn through formal education (Schempp et al., 2006). However, while psychological  
75 characteristics have emerged as relevant football performance predictors, expert coaches’  
76 assessments and perspectives on relevant performance characteristics have tended to be widely  
77 neglected in research (Musculus & Lobinger, 2018).

78

### 79 **Position-specific psychological attributes**

80 As previously discussed, football coaches consider PS to be of significant importance in the sport  
81 (Mills et al., 2012; Fuhre et al., 2022). Their opinion is not unfounded, as ample research exists on  
82 the benefits of PST (PST) in sports (Curry & Maniar, 2003; Vallerand et al., 2008; Edwards & Steyn,  
83 2008; Slimani et al., 2016). Football is a sport that demands many similar attributes, yet also distinct  
84 differences between positions (Murr et al., 2018). Psychological aspects of football are important  
85 components of talent identification and development, according to Berber et al. (2020). They  
86 interviewed eight high-level football coaches and developed models of interacting attributes for  
87 each position using the complex systems model Work Domain Analysis (WDA). The model  
88 includes various PS critical for performance, including anticipation, perception, prediction,  
89 recognition, situational awareness, creativity, and respect. Additional research on position-specific  
90 predictors similarly indicates that coaches value perceptual-cognitive attributes like decision-

91 making and anticipation more than technical skills (Roberts et al., 2019). Previous research has  
92 found differences in behavioural and performance profiles between positions and individuals  
93 occupying the same or similar positions (Taylor et al., 2004; Ermidis et al., 2019; Roberts et al.,  
94 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the requirements of different positional roles when  
95 developing PS in football (Thelwell et al., 2006). Hughes et al. (2012) assembled fifteen experts and  
96 51 PA students and tasked them with generating key performance indicators (KPIs) for seven  
97 positions in football. They grouped them into physiological, tactical, technical-defending,  
98 technical-attacking, and psychological and developed one generic set of KPIs for outfield players  
99 and a separate set for goalkeepers. The psychological KPIs across all positions were concentration,  
100 motivation, attitude, and body language. The authors stated that psychological KPI's can be  
101 measured objectively, reliably and accurately, yet did not provide a guide on how they should be  
102 assessed. Six years later, West (2018) published a review of goalkeeper KPI's building on the work  
103 of Hughes et al. (2012) and other previous research on the demands of the position (e.g. Spratford  
104 et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2015 and Nikolaidis et al., 2015). In the review, he discussed how decision-  
105 making and cue utilisation impacted confidence, affecting presence and attentional focus. While  
106 some progress has been made in identifying psychological characteristics unique to different  
107 positions in football, more research is needed. Additionally, there remains a lack of practical  
108 approaches and tools to effectively incorporate these insights into regular PST routines on the  
109 training ground.

110

### 111 **A hesitant approach to PST in football**

112 Although football coaches recognise the importance of PS (e.g. Fuhre et al., 2022) and research  
113 demonstrates the advantages of PST, (e.g. Slimani et al., 2016) they have traditionally tended to  
114 adopt a hesitant approach toward integrating PST into their training environment (Pain &  
115 Harwood, 2004; Johnson et al., 2011). Despite coaches being in a key position to deliver PST and  
116 being aware that they are important, the education and training they receive to educate,

117 communicate, and train those skills is minimal (Arthur et al., 2019). Challenges include not only  
118 low psychological literacy (Dean et al., 2022) but the power balance intricacies of the coach-athlete  
119 relationship, which can also create friction due to a blurred domain between the coach and the  
120 sport psychologist, trust issues, and lack of role clarity (Feddersen et al., 2020).

121 A study conducted at nine Danish football clubs offers insight into how a good program  
122 should be orchestrated (Diment, 2014). It proposed a coach-led drill-based program of seven PS  
123 (concentration, self-talk, communication, imagery, goal setting, constructive evaluation, and  
124 arousal control) using coach education and football-specific drills. It concludes that an effective  
125 PST program has to be “(a) part of the daily training environment, (b) that players and coaches  
126 should be actively involved, (c) that PST should be trained using sport-specific skills simulating  
127 competition settings, and (d) include regular and extended reinforcement of the psychological  
128 skills” (Diment, 2014, p. 26).

129

### 130 **Applying the 5Cs framework to professional coach knowledge**

131 Researchers and coaches agree that position-specific attributes are important (e.g. Thelwell et al.,  
132 2006; Berber et al., 2020), so there is importance in research that allows coaches to articulate the  
133 psychological performance behaviours they want their players to exhibit consistently. To adapt  
134 PST (particularly position-specific) into their daily routines, coaches must feel confident presenting  
135 it. The 5Cs framework was introduced to aid player and coach development in football and offers  
136 a theory-based approach that has demonstrated flexibility and ease of understanding for both  
137 coaches and players (Harwood, 2008). Consequently, the 5Cs could potentially serve as an effective  
138 tool for coaches to integrate PST into their daily training sessions and apply it in a position-specific  
139 manner, including efforts to enhance role clarity.

140 The 5Cs are made up of commitment, communication, concentration, control, and  
141 confidence (Harwood & Anderson, 2015). They are simple in presentation, flexible, and accessible  
142 in application, and have been adapted to various coaching environments in several football

143 academies (Steptoe et al., 2016). In research, the 5Cs have appeared as a PST model for positive  
144 youth development in youth sports settings. They have been used as an intervention method to  
145 enhance coach efficacy and a behaviour assessment tool for players (Harwood et al., 2015). The  
146 5Cs have also supplied the foundations of a vehicle for developing a shared vision, philosophy,  
147 and working model of psychological assessment, intervention, and evaluation to enhance  
148 performance at an English Premier League academy (Steptoe et al., 2019). They have also been  
149 tested as a reflective practice tool for coaches and to help parents with strategies for supporting  
150 psychosocial development within and beyond elite sports (Kramers et al., 2022). Hence, the 5Cs  
151 are a highly suitable framework for implementing PST into daily training routines and improving  
152 coach efficacy in enhancing role clarity as they become confident and consistent in their delivery  
153 through a common language.

154 This research utilised the 5Cs framework as a lens through which coaches could offer their  
155 perspectives and key psychological indicators of players in different playing positions. In doing so,  
156 the 5Cs framework was used by the coaches and researchers to co-construct psychologically related  
157 performance behaviours through their knowledge and experience. Enhanced role clarity makes it  
158 easier for coaches to communicate with players about good psychological performance and what  
159 is expected of them in competition and design training around the behaviours they value.  
160 Therefore, the present research study objectives were to combine an understanding of football  
161 performance skills based on expert coach knowledge with the 5Cs PST framework. The aim was  
162 to co-construct psychological role descriptions according to playing positions. An additional aim  
163 was to present a tool to help coaches utilise their expertise and knowledge to bring greater role  
164 clarity to their players and, hence, hopefully, gain enhanced confidence in coaching PS as part of  
165 their daily training environment.

## 166 **Method**

167

168 The research design employed an approach informed by pragmatic ontology and constructive  
169 epistemology, incorporating three phases of data collection and analysis (see Figure 1). Researchers  
170 apply pragmatism to attend to answers and tools that are useful to deal with practical problems  
171 and their effect on people and environments (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatists acknowledge that  
172 socio-cultural circumstances and subjective biases variously affect social research subjects  
173 according to specific contexts (Rorty, 1999). When applying constructivist principles, learners in  
174 sports are encouraged to construct their own knowledge while accepting the pluralism, complexity  
175 and interrelated dynamics that make up the sporting environment (Ollis & Sproule, 2007). This  
176 study emphasises collaborative design with knowledge users as it is believed to be an effective way  
177 to advance research and its impact on applied work (Nguyen et al., 2020) by building bridges  
178 between the academic and applied communities (Wehrens, 2014; Saleem et al., 2021). An  
179 important feature of co-design is its adaptive nature, with greater unpredictability regarding the  
180 outcome (Goodyear-Smith et al., 2015).

181 In phase one, a focus group enabled expert coaches to work on the positional framework,  
182 develop desired behaviours for each position, and assign them to a C. In phase two, coaches added  
183 depth through individual interviews. The researchers chose the three-phased approach to allow  
184 participants to disseminate their knowledge within a group setting where ideas could flow freely  
185 and be shaped by peer discussion. Then, with some distance from the focus group, they could  
186 unobtrusively add their own in a face-to-face discussion with the lead researcher. By limiting the  
187 discussion to a group discussion only, we feared that some voices or opinions would not be heard  
188 or that some voices would become dominant. The data collection process, therefore, became more  
189 robust by going through the focus group and then the semi-structured interviews. In phase three  
190 of the research, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis to create the role descriptions.  
191 Through all the phases, the lead author assumed a role as an expert in the 5Cs with professional  
192 coach experience, supported by authors two and three, who had significant experience in [*blinded*  
193 *for review*].

194

195

\*\*\*\*\* Figure 1 approximately here\*\*\*\*\*

196

## 197 **Participants**

198 Following institutional ethical approval from [*blinded for review*] twelve professional football coaches

199 from [*blinded for review*] were invited to participate in this project, and eight were able to attend (see

200 Table 1). The coaches were chosen through a convenience sample by the lead researcher with help

201 from the coach education department at the Football Association of [*blinded for review*]. The

202 participants were invited because of their then-recent experience at national and professional

203 levels, having held important coaching roles in various countries for more than ten years. All nine

204 participants had experience working with male senior teams, and five had experience working with

205 women's senior teams. Three of the coaches had experience as a coach in professional men's

206 football in different countries. Four had Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Pro

207 degrees which is the highest level possible in Europe, and four had UEFA A degrees which is the

208 second highest. One additional participant to the eight coaches did not have a UEFA A or Pro

209 license but had recent experience working on international and senior-level coaching staff. He also

210 worked as an associate professor in sports sociology, examining behaviour in sports competitions,

211 and was asked to participate due to his relevant applied and academic experience. All the

212 participants were male. At the time, no female in the country held a UEFA Pro degree, and the

213 few with a UEFA A degree had been coaching at relatively low levels at that time or for short

214 periods. Two female coaches were invited to participate but could not commit. Six of the

215 participants had worked in formal coach education roles, and four had represented their senior

216 national team as a player.

217

218

\*\*\*\*\* Table 1 approximately here\*\*\*\*\*

219



## 220 **Procedure and data analysis**

### 221 *Phase one –Focus group*

222 The participants received online learning material by email two weeks before the focus group  
223 meeting in September 2019. The learning material consisted of a one-hour video lecture in English  
224 explaining the 5Cs framework and its practical applications. All participants were fluent in English.  
225 They were instructed to watch the lecture before meeting at [blinded for review] University. Two of  
226 the authors directed the focus group. Author number one was a Union of European Football  
227 Associations (UEFA) A licensed coach and a PhD candidate with twenty years of experience  
228 working as a coach and coach educator, including experience applying the 5Cs as a coach with his  
229 teams. He knew all the participants professionally in various capacities, which facilitated a strong  
230 attendance from quality participants who were all among the top coaches in their country. Author  
231 number three was an Assistant Professor and a licensed sports psychologist from [blinded for review]  
232 with considerable applied and academic experience working with the 5Cs. He did not know any  
233 of the participants personally. The combination of his authority, drawn from working with top  
234 global football organisations and the lead author's local connection with the coaches, allowed for  
235 a lively and open discussion. The focus group lasted three hours. It started with a short recap of  
236 the 5Cs and examples of using the framework in applied settings. The participants were  
237 encouraged to ask questions and make comments. The participants were then asked to assemble  
238 randomly in groups of three, with the first task of determining the playing positions used in this  
239 research. All groups were handed writing material to collect notes and write their conclusions.  
240 Subsequently, the participants were asked to discuss players' desired behaviours in each agreed  
241 playing position. This collaborative process between the researchers and the professional coaches  
242 was intended to ensure that the output from the coaches' expert knowledge was consistent with  
243 the theories underpinning the Cs.

244           After the discussion, the participants merged into one joint group to work towards a  
245 consensus. They first decided on the following seven positions: goalkeeper, central defender, full-

246 back, defensive midfielder, attacking midfielder, winger, and forward. The group agreed that this  
247 designation would fit within most tactical systems. Next, the participants were asked to discuss the  
248 role descriptions describing desirable behaviours for each position with the researchers. Finally,  
249 they were asked to assign each behaviour to a C-attribute (i.e., commitment, communication,  
250 concentration, control and confidence) to enhance clarity and facilitate a common language  
251 between players and coaches. This discussion and co-construction were lively, with coaches  
252 explaining their stances on each behaviour and eventually agreeing on a common result. The  
253 researchers collected notes during the whole proceedings of the workshop on important discussion  
254 points, and the groups handed in their notes with outcomes from small and large groups at the  
255 end.

#### 256 *Phase one – Compiling the Data*

257 The lead researcher [*blinded for review*] compiled the data from the focus group using Microsoft  
258 Excel. Emerging from the focus group were the seven positions, and attached to each position  
259 were several desirable behaviours assigned to a C. Examples included a goalkeeper “going  
260 assertively for a high ball in his penalty area,” which was most often labelled as showing exemplary  
261 commitment or confidence. A full-back, “quick to get into wide positions,” would most often be  
262 praised for exemplary commitment and concentration. Themes were suggested around assigned  
263 Cs and coded according to the colours assigned by Harwood and Anderson (2015) to each C  
264 attribute.

265 **\*\*\*\*\* Table 2 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

266 As time had been limited in the focus group, an interview guide was then created to facilitate more  
267 in-depth data collection and analysis with each coach.

#### 268 *Phase two – Individual Semi-Structured Interviews*

269 The lead researcher interviewed each of the nine participants four to ten months after the focus  
270 group. The interviews allowed each coach to explain their role requirements more deeply. The  
271 interviews were semi-structured and extensive, lasting between 90 – 120 minutes. Four interviews

272 were conducted face-to-face and recorded on iPhone Voice Memos. Due to the onset of COVID-  
273 19 restrictions during the process, five participants were interviewed through MS Teams or Zoom  
274 online meeting platforms. The researcher and the participating coach reviewed the 5Cs and the  
275 combined results from the focus group. During the interview each participant was asked the three  
276 following questions for each playing position:

277 1) What behaviours do you expect from players in this position?

278 2) How can you observe the behaviours?

279 3) Which C do you think each behaviour is connected to?

280 The individual semi-structured interview procedure can be seen in Figure 2. Each coach was asked  
281 for their individual opinions. Football jargon regularly emerged during the interviews. Examples  
282 from the coaches included how players should display the “correct positioning” without further  
283 explanation or “must be aggressive” without describing the form or level of aggression. The  
284 researcher would note the behaviours that the coaches wanted and, in the presence of jargon or  
285 unclear descriptions, seek better explanations. The researcher actively probed for clarity, asking  
286 how the behaviour could be identified by different people observing the game. Furthermore, he  
287 offered guidance on how they corresponded with the 5C framework and its underpinning theories  
288 if the coach was unsure. Each coach could add as many behaviours as they wished, and then the  
289 discussion moved on to the next position. During the interview, the researcher noted down all the  
290 behaviours and their assigned Cs in Microsoft Excel.

291

292 **\*\*\*\*\* Figure 2 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

293 *Phase Three – Data Analysis*

294 Combining the individual semi-structured interviews with the data from the focus group, the  
295 researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis (QCA), systematically approaching the data at  
296 hand to identify their content and meaning. The six steps of thematic analysis (TA) by Braun and  
297 Clarke (2006) served as a guide as a theoretically flexible approach to analysing, identifying, and

298 reporting patterns within qualitative data. It is important to note that there is no universal way of  
299 conducting TA, and it should be understood as a synonym of various and perhaps conflicting  
300 approaches that aim to capture patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). TA approaches coding as  
301 an organic and flexible process and considers the researcher's subjectivity integral (Terry et al.,  
302 2017). Therefore, TA researchers must consider their ontological and epistemological position  
303 during the process (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Hence, we approached this analysis in a post-positivist  
304 way that sees the researchers' motivations as crucial in extracting meaning and creating new  
305 knowledge (Schatz & Walker, 2005) by collaborating with professional coaches to construct a  
306 helpful tool for daily practice.

307 Braun and Clarke (2020) describe how the various approaches to TA can be clustered into  
308 three main areas. In the positivist corner, 'coding reliability' TA has the main concern of objective  
309 and unbiased coding, while on the opposite side 'reflexive' TA represents a totally open and  
310 organic approach. Due to the nature of the research, our approach fell in between the two, in the  
311 'codebook' category making pragmatic compromises of structured frameworks and subjective  
312 data. The lead researcher collected the data and transcribed the nine individual semi-structured  
313 interviews. Then, he familiarised himself with the content through repeated reading, reviewing and  
314 comparison with notes from both the interviews and field notes from the focus group. As the  
315 culture within football shapes its language it was important to be aware of latency in the data. The  
316 authors discussed the 5C themes and their relevance for several months, generating initial codes  
317 (e.g. offers to receive, controlled passing, anticipation) to identify similarities within the data. In  
318 this case, a wide net was cast, and all the behaviours described by the coaches were typed up as a  
319 list in Microsoft Excel by position and their corresponding C designated by the coaches. Many  
320 behaviours were mentioned multiple times through slight wording differences and were  
321 interpreted and combined into one. Others were unclear and were eliminated, most often for being  
322 too vague to observe (ex. "goalkeepers should have a strong presence" or "I want my forward to  
323 have a killer instinct"). In some behaviours, multiple Cs were deemed appropriate by the coaches.

324 The analysis vetted the outcome against each C's theoretical underpinning and utilised the colour  
325 scheme from the 5Cs for clarity. As a final step, co-authors reviewed the role descriptions, giving  
326 comments and suggestions on the clarity of the descriptions. For inclusion, behaviours had to be  
327 well-defined and easily observable. Eventually, a set of role descriptions for seven playing positions  
328 were identified.

329

330

## Results

331 From this three-stage data collection and analysis process, the results are presented in the following  
332 seven figures as role descriptions according to positions, with the corresponding Cs attached and  
333 arranged by the 5Cs colour scheme. The role descriptions were designed to be used by coaches  
334 coaching youth football players to help them explain the desired behaviours they wanted to  
335 encourage, see, and develop in each playing position. Figures 3-9 display the desired behaviours  
336 from the thematic analysis.

337

338

**\*\*\*\*\* Figure 3 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

339 The role description for goalkeepers is shown in Figure 3. The results of the thematic analysis  
340 found thirteen key behaviours. The coaches placed the most importance on goalkeepers showing  
341 concentration, assigning it four behaviours, then commitment with three, and communication,  
342 control, and confidence with two each.

343

344

**\*\*\*\*\* Figure 4 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

345 Figure 4 shows the role description for the central defender, counting fifteen behaviours that  
346 appeared in the thematic analysis. Communication and concentration were assigned four  
347 behaviours, confidence three, commitment and control two.

348

349

**\*\*\*\*\* Figure 5 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

350 The role description for full-backs is shown in Figure 5. With eighteen behaviours from the  
351 thematic analysis, more than any other position, control was assigned to six, commitment to five,  
352 concentration to four, communication to two, and confidence to one.

353

354 **\*\*\*\*\* Figure 6 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

355 Figure 6 describes the role of defensive midfielders. The thematic analysis revealed twelve  
356 behaviours: five as control, three each for communication and concentration and one for  
357 commitment.

358

359 **\*\*\*\*\* Figure 7 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

360 Figure 7 describes the role description for attacking midfielders. The thematic analysis for this  
361 position revealed fourteen behaviours. Five were assigned to confidence, three to control, and two  
362 each to commitment, communication, and concentration.

363

364 **\*\*\*\*\* Figure 8 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

365 The thematic analysis revealed fifteen behaviours for wingers in Figure 8. Six behaviours were  
366 assigned to confidence, none to communication, four to control, three to concentration, and two  
367 to commitment.

368

369 **\*\*\*\*\* Figure 9 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

370 Figure 9 has the role description for the forwards. The thematic analysis revealed fifteen  
371 behaviours: seven assigned to confidence, three to concentration, three to commitment, and two  
372 to control.

373

374 **\*\*\*\*\* Table 3 approximately here\*\*\*\*\***

375

376 Table 3 depicts the total frequency of each C across the seven positions. Control and confidence  
377 are most frequent at twenty-four, followed by concentration at twenty-three. Commitment appears  
378 eighteen times, and with the fewest at thirteen is communication.

379

380

381

## Discussion

382 This research aimed to combine an understanding of football performance skills, based on  
383 professional coach knowledge, with the 5Cs PST framework (Harwood, 2008) to co-construct  
384 psychological role descriptions according to playing positions. Furthermore, it presents a tool to  
385 help coaches utilise their expertise and knowledge to bring greater role clarity to their players and  
386 hopefully gain enhanced confidence in coaching PS as part of their daily training environment.  
387 The results are seven positional role descriptions that can help coaches frame, communicate, and  
388 deliver their expectations using a common point of reference.

389 Shared understanding and communication can influence training design by emphasising  
390 competitive role requirements. We agree with Diment (2014) that PST should be part of the daily  
391 training environment, actively involving players and coaches, using sport-specific skills that  
392 simulate competition and are regularly and extensively reinforced. Previous collaborative efforts  
393 between academics and coaches indicate that describing position-specific attributes is worthwhile  
394 due to the complexity of the game and the varying requirements between different positions  
395 (Hughes et al., 2012; West, 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Berber et al. 2020). This research differs  
396 from other research on position specific attributes in combining the performance skills with the  
397 5Cs and the resulting tool for applied use.

398 Whereas Hughes et al. (2012) findings through collaboration with coaches emphasised the  
399 same PS across all positions, our results reveal more differences in what is required of players in  
400 different positions. Observing differences between positional requirements, the role descriptions

401 vividly explain a player's expected performance roles within a team from the coaches' perspectives.  
402 The coaches explained how the goalkeeper, central defender, and defensive midfielder have a  
403 vantage point of the game and must assume an organisational role. Similarly, as best depicted in  
404 the defensive midfielder role descriptions, concentration and control are required to manage the  
405 team in transition. This is similar to the results of Roberts et al. (2019) where coaches rated  
406 decision-making especially important in these positions. The different numbers of required  
407 behaviours from each position are also telling and consistent with the positional roles proposed  
408 by Plakias et al. (2023). The defensive midfielder had twelve, indicating a highly specific role.  
409 Conversely, the full-back had eighteen behaviours noted, or fifty per cent more, due to a dual  
410 attacking/defensive role and the expansive area they are expected to cover.

411         The coaches expected the full-back to cover a larger area than others. Hence, this position  
412 was perceived to demand high levels of commitment and control due to the physical and emotional  
413 requirements of the role. This corresponds with data from the UEFA Champions League, where  
414 full-backs cover similar distances as midfielders but deliver more high-intensity running  
415 throughout games (Šunjić et al., 2024), and the English Premier League, where they performed the  
416 most overlapping actions (Ade et al., 2016). Meanwhile, echoing Razali et al. (2017) on predicting  
417 playing positions in talent identification, the three forward positions of attacking midfielder,  
418 winger, and forward demand confident players who can break up the game's structure, showing  
419 initiative and resilience.

420         Across all positions, coaches emphasised control, confidence, and concentration more  
421 than commitment and communication. The reasons for this are unclear, but research suggests that  
422 coaches' perceptions of coaching and talent development are shaped by their culture (Sarmiento et  
423 al., 2013; Vaughan et al., 2021), and in this instance, the participants were all male coaches from  
424 the same country. The coaches appeared focused on the primary duty of each position, prioritising  
425 the defensive responsibilities of the defensive positions (goalkeeper, central defender and  
426 defensive midfielder) and the attacking role of the attacking midfielder, winger or forward. All



427 positions have duties related to both, but the coaches did not emphasise, for example, the pressing  
428 role of the forward or the attacking role a central defender can play on set pieces. A clue as to why  
429 can be found in examining the twenty-one positional roles proposed by Aalbers and Van Haaren  
430 (2019), where primary role attributes are even more emphasised. Based on research and the  
431 computer game Football Manager, which influences the scouting processes of some professional  
432 clubs, concentrated attributes clearly define the primary duties expected in each position. Their  
433 research was meant to help coaches emphasise the attributes players should have to fit their playing  
434 style. It must be noted that while this supports our emphasis on role clarity, our research is  
435 motivated not to identify players but to help coaches enhance their players' growth by explaining  
436 and working on the attributes that they find important. For example, no attention was paid to  
437 communication skills among wingers. This may not mean that coaches do not value  
438 communication in this role. However, it reveals its most salient attributes and provides a lens  
439 through which players can see where their developmental priorities may lie.

440         The 5Cs were originally developed as a framework for positive youth development. While  
441 no specific age group has been identified as the optimal in which to start PST (Lauer et al., 2017),  
442 it has been shown to yield positive effects for children aged from 7 years old (McCarthy et al.,  
443 2010). This research is novel in the way its purpose is to enhance sporting performance, by utilising  
444 the flexibility and accessibility inherent in the 5Cs. The researchers' intent was for this to be a tool  
445 that should first be introduced in early or middle adolescence between the ages of 12-15 as young  
446 people develop an increased concept of self and self-esteem (Harter, 2015; Bialecka-Pikul et al.,  
447 2019) and players are gradually exposed to the game in an adult format (Brito et al., 2019). As this  
448 is also where, for better or worse, the focus on performance in modern talent development models  
449 gradually increases (Gulbin et al., 2013; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), we believe that it is imperative to  
450 offer tools built on the same framework used for positive development to include those elements  
451 in the training of performance skills.

452 *Limitations*

453 The results of this study represent the inputs and outputs of a high-level sample of professional  
454 coaches over two collaborative interactions with the researchers. An argument can be made that  
455 instead of enhancing role clarity, positioning the 5Cs according to positions can be too  
456 reductionist, to the point of limiting players and coaches in their approach to the game. But as  
457 Musculus and Lobinger (2018) have noted, research must involve coaches, find out what they find  
458 important, and then help them by providing valuable tools. The participants were all male and  
459 from the same country, language, and football culture, and low diversity, including having no  
460 female input, is a limiting factor. The authors acknowledge that playing style, tactics, and culture  
461 can affect the results in different settings, but in this research, the emphasis was on the process, as  
462 outcomes can vary between groups. It also needs to be clarified how language can shape  
463 understanding of concepts relating to each C. Hence, these role descriptions may serve as generic  
464 starting points, as they do not belong to a single team or organisation or represent all teams.  
465 Coaches can adopt the method described here to discuss and determine their own role descriptions  
466 using the 5Cs as a lens. The method can be helpful in applied settings to assist coaches in clarifying  
467 and delivering their messages about position-specific behaviours, thus informing and enhancing  
468 much-needed role clarity for players when playing under the coach. Finally, while the data  
469 collection itself was not impacted by the effects of COVID-19, various circumstances in the  
470 authors' professional and personal lives were. This delayed the data analysis, writing and  
471 submission of the eventual article, which might be seen as a limitation.

#### 472 *Future research recommendations*

473 As the 5Cs framework and the tool provided here are flexible, they allow for easy customisation  
474 and redesign according to the coach and the context or age group. Future research should focus  
475 on applying the role descriptions in various contexts and evaluating if their use improves  
476 performance and player development. In addition, comparing 5C role descriptions between  
477 different countries or cultures or at different stages of player development would help understand  
478 how best coaches can communicate their performance needs to players within the appropriate

479 context. It is furthermore necessary to understand how the input of female coaches or coaches  
480 from different cultures would differ or add to the work already done.

481         There is also potential in using the role descriptions to record model positional behaviour  
482 through game observation. By analysing PS in competitive settings in a similar way that is done  
483 with tactics, coaches could provide structured feedback and strategically design practices according  
484 to positional needs to nurture player confidence, skills, and performance. Consequently, role  
485 description-based intervention work with coaches and youth teams would form appropriate  
486 educational and applied research opportunities to advance this study. It can also provide sports  
487 psychologists with a way of evaluating the efficacy of interventions through a change in valued 5C  
488 behaviours.

#### 489 **Conclusion**

490 This research illustrates the utility value of the 5Cs as a user-friendly, organising framework for  
491 coaches integrating psychological behaviours into their football practice and management.  
492 Collaboration with coaches has shown how the 5Cs can help coaches frame their coaching  
493 philosophy and playing style into role descriptions. The role descriptions created from this study  
494 offer the potential for a clearer common language of desirable actions and behaviours related to  
495 psychological performance. By moving away from jargon and towards increased role clarity for  
496 players, the coach can better explain what they seek to coach and develop in ways that may  
497 ultimately improve their efficacy in coaching PS and enhance their players' role efficacy.

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765 **Tables**

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767 **Table 1**768 *Participants from the focus group and individual semi-structured interviews*

Coach	Age	Degree	Experience
P1	44	UEFA PRO	Senior club level, youth level as a coach. Association coach educator.
P2	50	UEFA PRO	Professional senior club level, youth level as coach. Association coach educator. Professional and national team as player. League and cup champion as coach.
P3	51	UEFA PRO	Professional senior club level, youth level. Professional and national team as player. League and cup champion as coach.
P4	54	UEFA PRO	Professional senior club level, youth level. Association coach educator. Cup champion as coach.
P5	47	UEFA A	National team, senior club level, youth level as coach. Association coach educator. League and cup champion as coach.
P6	46	UEFA A	Senior club level as coach. Professional and national team as player.
P7	36	UEFA A	Senior club level, youth level as coach. Association coach educator. National team as player.
P8	43	UEFA A	Senior club level, youth level as coach. Cup champion as coach.
P9	47	PhD	National team coaching staff, senior club level coaching staff, youth level as coach.

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771 **Table 2**772 *The colour association and content of each of the 5Cs*

C	Colour	Content
Commitment	Purple	High effort levels and discipline. Shows persistence and willingness to committ. Eager to take on challenges. Driven to learn, and reviews own performance.
Communication	Green	Helpful and directing communication. Listens and accepts feedback. Is a good HELPA by helping, encouraging, listening, praising and acknowledging.
Concentration	Yellow	Consistent performer. Shows awareness of game situations. Focused on task at hand. Problem solver.
Control	Blue	Adjusts emotional intensity to situations. Responds constructively to others. Calm and composed performer.
Confidence	Red	Beliefs in own abilities to execute tasks. Takes opportunities. Shows courage and takes initiative at key moments.

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774 **Table 3**775 *Frequency of Cs across all positions*

Position	Commitment	Communication	Concentration	Control	Confidence
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Goalkeeper	3	2	4	2	2
Central defender	2	4	4	2	3
Full-back	5	2	4	6	1
Defensive midfielder	1	3	3	5	0
Attacking midfielder	2	2	2	3	5
Winger	2	0	3	4	6
Forward	3	0	3	2	7
Total	18	13	23	24	24

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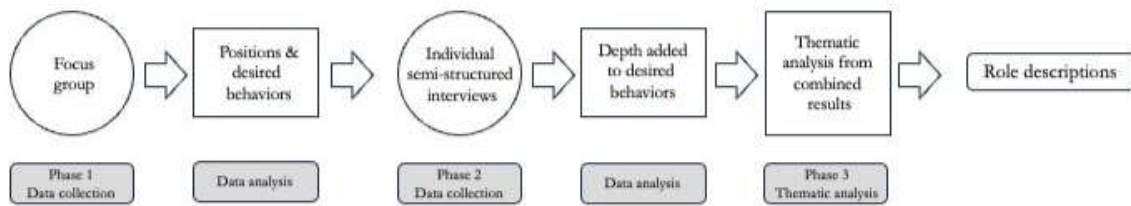
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790 **Figures**

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792 **Figure 1**

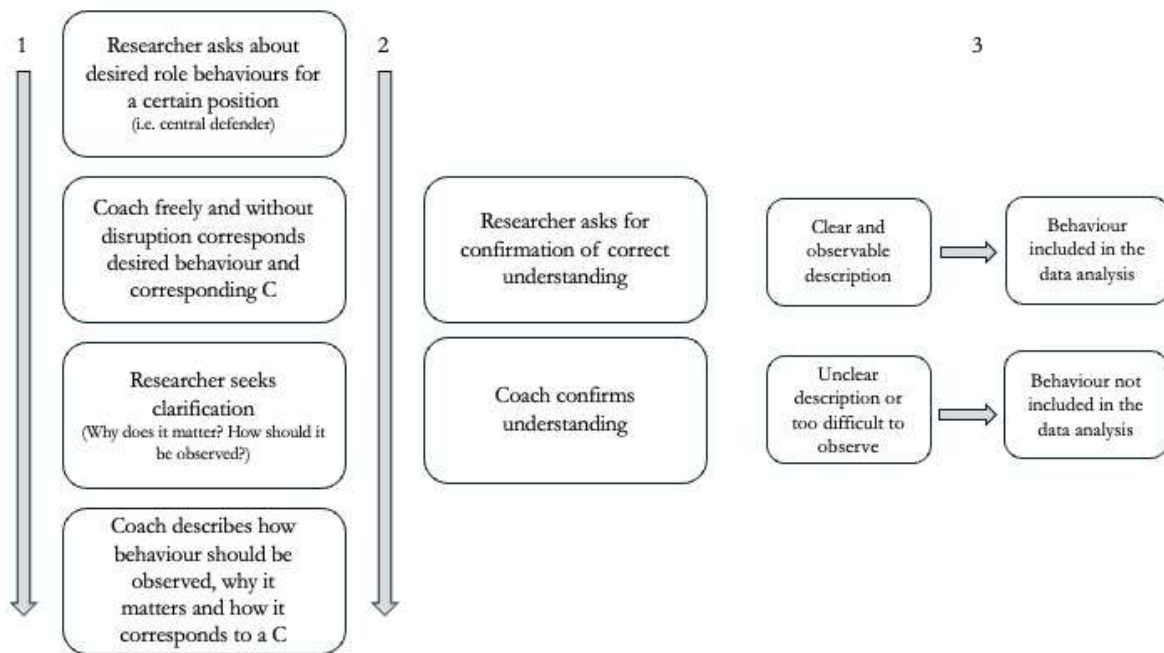
793 *Phases of the data collection and the thematic analysis*



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795 **Figure 2**

796 *Individual semi-structured interview procedure*



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798 **Figure 3**

799 *5Cs Role Description – Goalkeeper*

Bravely enters physical encounters without hesitation  
 Takes responsibility to close own corner while trusting defenders to close theirs.  
 Visibly and quickly organizes defense on set pieces.  
 Organizes defence with direct verbal communication  
 Loud verbal announcement when going for ball  
 Remains alert when the game is on the other side of the field  
 Refrains from unnecessary risks.  
 Constantly scans the whole field when not in direct action  
 Is ready for counter attacks by tracking back to close goal or going for through balls  
 Reliable delivery from goal kicks, both from the ground and hands  
 Assertive counter movement towards ball when saving shots and going for crosses  
 Visibly regains composure quickly after mistakes.  
 Present self big and tall at all times.



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801 **Figure 4**

802 *5Cs Role Description – Central Defender*

Bravely enters physical encounters without hesitation  
 Does not allow easy chances, by always getting a nudge on the ball or man  
 Calm and decisive non-verbal communication at all times  
 Organizes defense through clear and direct verbal and non-verbal messages  
 Maintain calm and directive attitude towards teammates  
 Holds self and teammates accountable when under pressure or mistakes happen  
 Avoids crossing lines with other Central Defender, passing the attacker on, and holding the line  
 Constantly scans field to anticipate how game evolves  
 Anticipates how game evolves by being first to ball if played through or high  
 Anticipates how game evolves by directing team up the field to keep shape in attack  
 Steps up or falls back in unison with other defenders  
 Organizes defensive line to tighten if a player leaves it  
 Stay on feet at all possible times, only slides in emergencies  
 Does not try high-risk passes or moves when stakes are high  
 Decisive passing that does not leave opponents room to steal



803

804 **Figure 5**

805 *5Cs Role Description – Full-back*

Maintains intense work rate throughout the game  
 Quickly gets back into defensive shape by sprinting back or replace other position  
 Bravely enters physical encounters without hesitation  
 Displays willingness to attack by committing to runs  
 Steps up or falls back in unison with other defenders  
 Verbally directs winger in attack and defense  
 Verbally directs defense when ball is on other wing  
 Tightens defensive line if another player leaves it  
 Is constantly aware of both man and ball when covering far post area  
 Times runs up the field to receive the ball in space to run forward with pace  
 Play safe and restart attack from back if attacking opportunity has been closed down  
 Guides the attacker to gain a numerical advantage when defending  
 Is quick into wide position to allow team to play from the back  
 Is quick to offer himself as an option to receive ball in attacking play  
 Offers options of over-or underlap when attacking in opponents half  
 Cross ball into path between central defenders and goalkeepers when low  
 Cross with pull back onto penalty spot or far post when high  
 Decisive passing that does not leave opponents room to steal



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808 **Figure 6**

809 *5Cs Role Description – Defensive midfielder*

Bravely enters physical encounters without hesitation  
 Exhibits constant verbal and non-verbal directions and encouragement  
 Organizes teammates into positions to close down space when defending  
 Triggers pressing on the ball with verbal communication  
 Closes down passing lanes from defence/midfield to forward players  
 Controls tempo of game when on ball by speeding up or slowing down play  
 Play safe and restart attack from back if attacking opportunity has been closed down  
 Display calm feelings at all times.  
 Does not tackle if the team is in defensive transition, runs with ball carrier to slow play down  
 Avoids high-risk passes or moves when stakes are high  
 Does not lose ball to opponents with bad passes or mistakes in 1v1  
 Switches play with decisive passing from one wing to other



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811 **Figure 7**

812 *5Cs Role Description – Attacking midfielder*



Quickly gets back into defensive shape by sprinting back or replace other position  
 Makes runs into box when playing high on the field  
 Triggers pressing on the ball with verbal communication  
 Changes position with other attackers by running in and out of space  
 Scans surroundings when offering self as an option to receive  
 Is ready to pounce with pass or dribble or shot even if uninvolved for a while  
 Constantly offers self as an option to receive the ball in attack  
 Displays good timing of runs in and out of space to receive ball  
 Passes and runs in opposing directions of play, gaining extra space  
 Moves into half-space between midfield and full back to receive ball  
 First attempts to play forward after winning or receiving ball  
 Takes risks by taking on players 1v1 and passing into dangerous areas  
 Constantly attempts to create attacking opportunities for self or others  
 Plays and runs with ball into spaces that create overload (2:1, 3:2 etc.)



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814 **Figure 8**

815 *5Cs Role Description – Winger*

Quickly gets back into defensive shape by sprinting back or replace other position  
 Dribbles past players with explosive movement  
 Immediately takes advantage of open space by running with ball or passing  
 Is quick to turn on and exploit mistakes in opponents defence  
 Play safe and restart attack from back if attacking opportunity has been closed down  
 Immediately takes up wide position when team plays from back  
 Constantly offers self as an option to receive the ball in attack  
 Displays good timing of runs in and out of space to receive ball  
 Changes position with other attackers by running in and out of space  
 Moves into space between midfield and defense if full back goes for overlap  
 Seeks to receive the ball in the middle-space between defense and attack  
 Is willing to receive ball in tight and complicated spaces  
 Displays initiative by going quickly and aggressively on attack 1v1  
 Attempts to attack and enter the box at every opportunity  
 Does not dwell on mistakes by getting quickly involved in the game again.



816

817 **Figure 9**

818 *5Cs Role Description – Forward*

Plays off the defender, positions between and behind until opportunity comes  
 Makes decisive runs into the box when opportunity arrives  
 Arrives into good scoring zones in the box between the posts  
 Optimal timing of runs in and out of space by not occupying the same as others  
 Play safe and restart attack from back if attacking opportunity has been closed down  
 Makes a pass when someone is better placed  
 Constantly offers self as an option to receive the ball in attack  
 Changes position with other attackers running in and out of space  
 First attempts to play forward after winning or receiving ball  
 Decisively takes on defenders 1v1, especially when facing last line of defense  
 Attempts to get into shooting positions when receiving the ball around box  
 Takes shots when opportunity arises  
 Measured shots or placements when striking at goal  
 Does not dwell on mistakes by getting quickly involved in the game again.  
 Maintains positive body language at all times, appearing big and tall

