APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY IN ELITE SPORT

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WE CARE. WE COLLABORATE. WE INNOVATE. WE EXCEL.

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INTRODUCTION

BASES Accredited Sport and Exercise Psychologist (HCPC)

Senior performance psychologist and technical lead with the UKSI for last two Olympic cycles

Background in Olympic, Paralympic and professional elite sport

PhD in the psychology of talent development

THE PROBLEM WITH SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Athletes don’t know what we do

Teams don’t know how to use us effectively

Organisations often think they need us, but don’t really know why

THE PROBLEM WITH SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

- Sport and exercise psychologists are practitioner psychologists who seek to apply psychological knowledge, skills and expertise within the context of sport and exercise

(BPS, 2024)

- Sport psychology is a proficiency that uses psychological knowledge and skills to address optimal performance and well-being of athletes, developmental and social aspects of sports participation, and systemic issues associated with sports settings and organizations

(APA, 2024)

THE PROBLEM WITH SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

“Drink a lot of coffee, lurk in the corridors and just chat to people”

(My former head coach, 2020ish)

THE PROBLEM WITH SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

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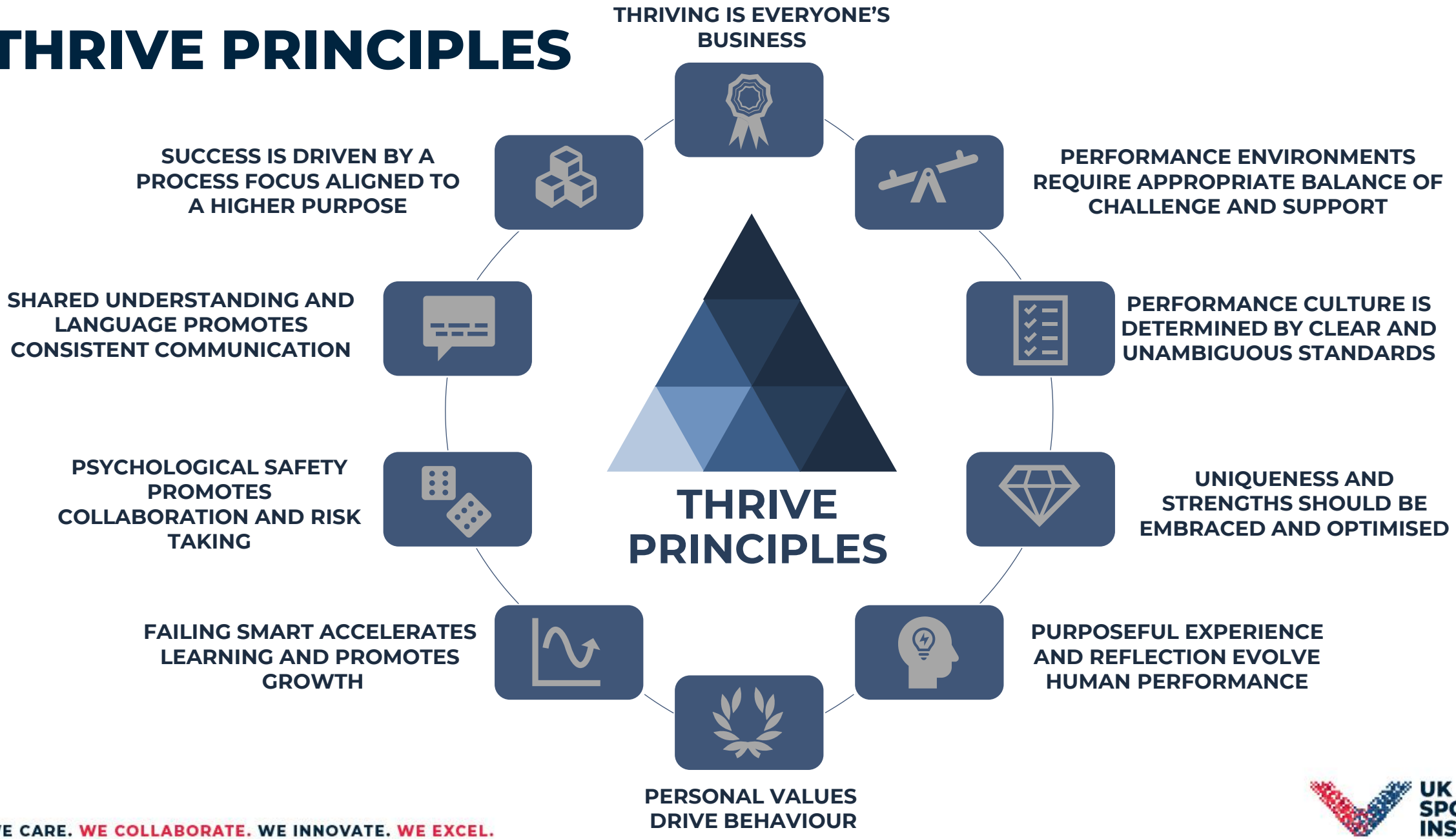
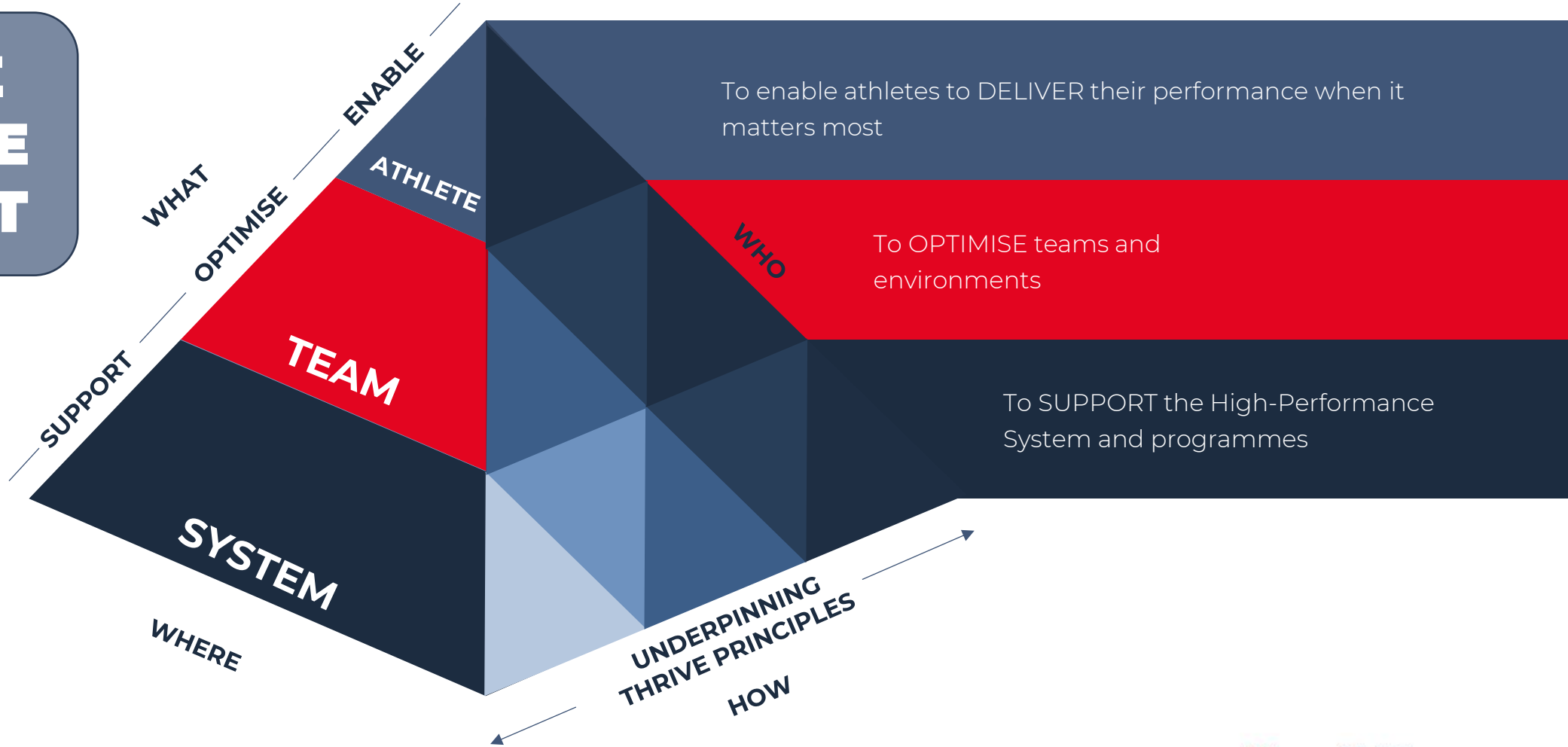
Sport psychology is a very intangible discipline

THRIVE PRINCIPLES



OUR FRAMEWORK

ENABLE
OPTIMISE
SUPPORT



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DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

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- Accountability through deliberate work
- Based on needs analysis - what it takes to win
- Individual athlete needs
- Brought to life through delivery framework

EXAMPLE STRATEGY

calm	Self-awareness (understanding of my unique responses to anxiety / pressure) Self-regulation under pressure – clear routines and methods, 'in the moment'
confident	Strengths – knowing that I can / what makes me able / unique Courage to commit and go all in
consistent	Understanding my method in order to replicate reliably Process for learning and reflection Motivation to go again – my 'Why'
connected	Shared understanding of method (individual, synchro, coach) Shared understanding of each other (personality, signs, triggers etc.)

EXAMPLE STRATEGY

"CALM"

Athlete	Team	System
Awareness of own personality preferences and ability to flex where appropriate. Awareness of own pressure responses and triggers. Robust and reliable method for effective regulation under pressure. Replicable routines for pre-performance, including camps and travel.	Awareness of personality preferences, triggers and responses throughout team, flexing to support the athlete (and each other) where appropriate. Coaching / support team able to manage own responses to pressure effectively. Shared awareness of regulation method and routines, integrated into coaching / training practices.	*Clearly communicated performance expectations.* *Clear and timely communication of logistics.* *Support to manage external individual stressors.* **Any measures that proactively mitigate anxiety or uncertainty**

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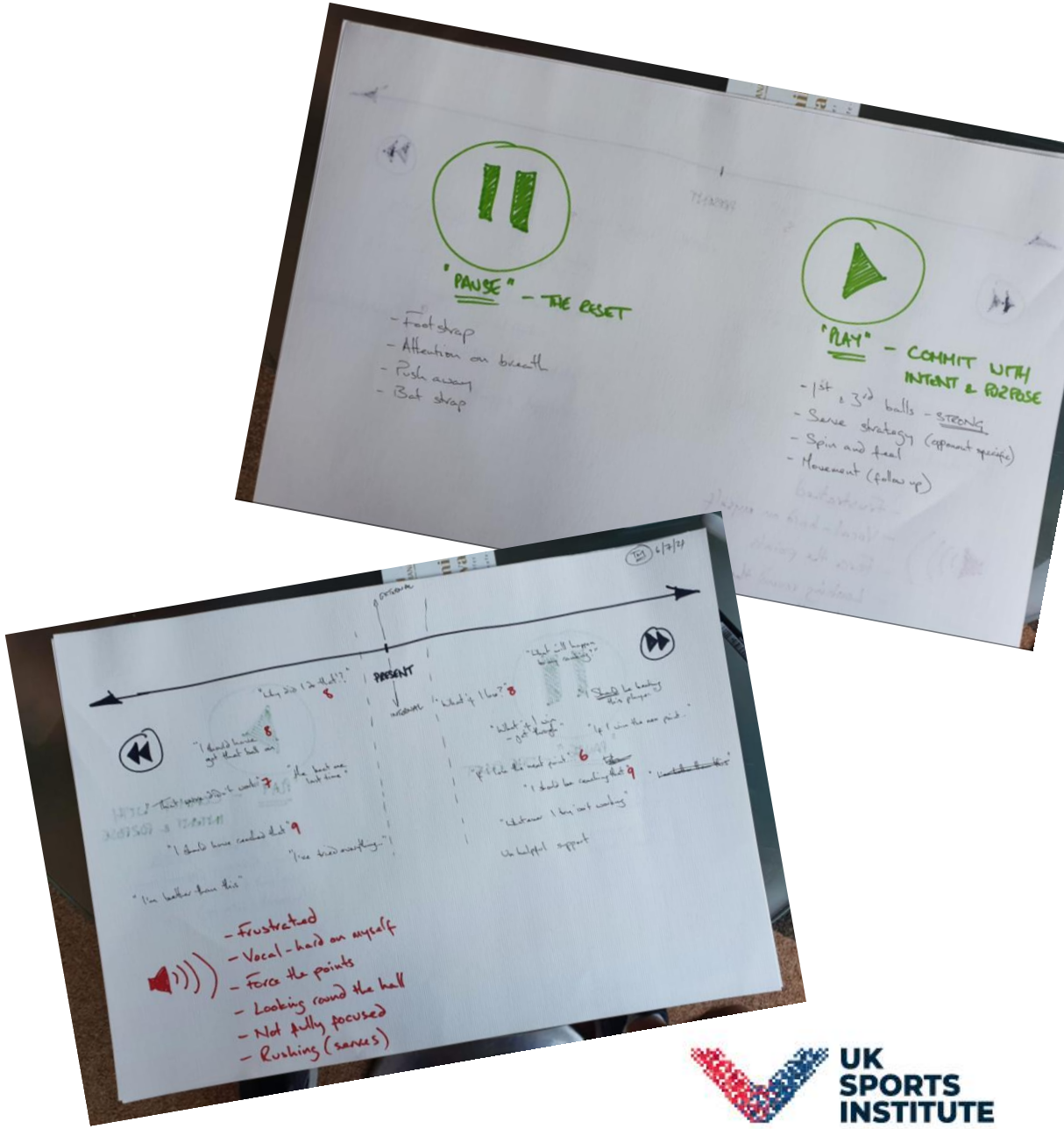
ATHLETE LEVEL

Focus on the right thing, at the right time

EXAMPLE: ATHLETE LEVEL



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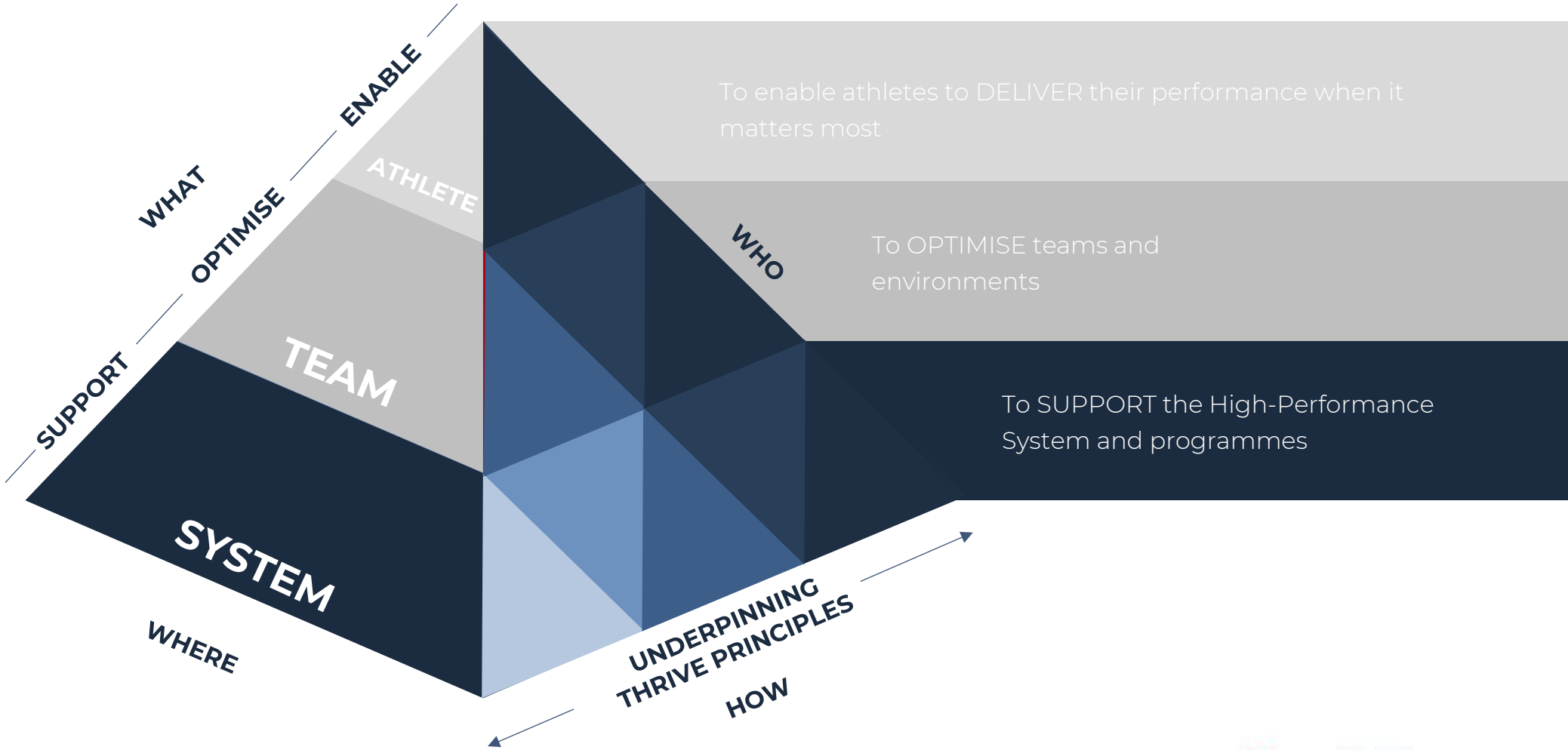
TEAM LEVEL WORKING

- Working with the team behind the team is often area for greatest impact
- Teams often less than the sum of their parts
- Human connection underpins human performance
- Targeting psychological safety
- Power of purpose
- Balancing challenge and support
- Embracing diversity of thought and perspectives

SYSTEM LEVEL WORKING



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SUMMARY

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- Sport psychology is often too abstract for its own good
- Effective psych impacts at three different levels concurrently
- Explicit strategies based on needs analyses help us be more accountable for our work
- At an athlete level, it's about helping them focus on the right thing at the right time.
- The team level is often where we have our greatest impact.
- Process-based, system-level work helps supports the people in the system to optimise their performance.

THANK YOU

Questions?