

DESCRIPTION OF AN EXPERT VOLLEYBALL COACH'S COMMUNICATION PROFILE AND THE RATIONALE UNDERLYING SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS THROUGHOUT A SEASON: A CASE STUDY

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1- Introduction

- a- Previous studies have shown the prevalence of specific coaches' behaviors : (a) *Instructions*, (b) *feedback*, (c) *encouragements* and (d) *questions* (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Douge & Hastie, 1993; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Lacy & Goldston, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976).
- b- The frequency of these behaviors vary according to : (a) *coaches' success*; (b) *season period* and (c) *sport* (Claxton, 1988; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Lacy & Goldston, 1989; Markland & Martinek, 1988).
- c- Furthermore, coaches use three or four factors in the decision making process for more than half of their interventions (Trudel, Haughian & Gilbert, 1996).
- d- 70% of these factors come from information only available during game time and less than a third is relied to prerequisite game information (Trudel et al., 1996).
- e- Collecting quantitative data on coaches' behaviours as a limited significance if the intervention situational context is not considered (objectives, season period, sport and sport's culture, etc.).
- f- In order to better understand coaches' intervention, it is imperative to study the rationale underlying coaches' decisions in addition to coaches' intervention analysis based on systematic observation (Jones, Housner & Kornspan, 1995; Trudel, Haughian & Gilbert, 1996).

2- Objectives

- a- Describe a coach's communication profile toward his athletes during selected practices throughout a full season, by showing the frequency of specific coach's behaviors related to pedagogical functions.
- b- Understand the rationale underlying selected coach's interventions.

3- Theoretical framework

Situated action theory : Theoretical approach in cognitive and social sciences that states that every human action is codetermined by the physical and social contexts and essentially depends upon circumstances (Saury & Séve, 2004).

Coaching Model : Coaching is a process oriented on athletes' development, where the coach's behaviors are related to a) training b) competition and c) organization. These behaviors are influenced by a) coach's personal characteristics; b) athlete's personal characteristics and c) contextual factors (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1995).

4- Method

RESEARCH DESIGN

A single case study research design is used to describe a particular case in his context (Yin, 2003). In this study, an expert volley-ball coach (and his team) represents the single case.

PARTICIPANTS

Based on the definition of an expert coach (Côté et al., 1995), the participant of this study a) coaches a university team that performs on a national level, b) was an international athlete in this discipline, c) has 13 years of experience as a coach, d) has coached professional athletes and national teams and e) has an expertise well recognized amongst his peers:

«He's a coach that really wants to understand his athletes... Not many coaches reflects and analyzes tasks as thoroughly as he does... He's not afraid to take time to better understand the past in order to plan the future. He adapts his coaching methods to the latest scientific conclusions and to his athletes in order to reach the highest performance levels». - An international coach in another discipline.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Pedagogical Communication Observation System (PCOS) (Desbiens, Roy, Spallanzani, Brunelle & Lacasse, 2005)

Objective : Describe practice according to communicational behaviors (event recording, Siedentop & Tannehill, 2000).

Throughout the season, one practice per week was filmed using a video camera and a cordless microphone. The practice was chosen by the coach according to its pedagogical potential. The camera focused on the coach who wore the microphone and his immediate surroundings.

Analysis : The coding of practice's data was done using pre-recorded video tapes. Descriptive data were collected and presented as frequencies.

Interviews

Pre-practice interview: A fifteen minutes interview focusing on coach's practice plan and team context.

Post-practice interview: A fifteen minutes interview in order to collect coaches' self-evaluation and comments (significant interventions) regarding the practice.

Stimulated recall interview (Tochon, 1996): An interview based on the presentation of selected video sequences of the coach's interventions. After viewing a sequence, the coach is asked to elaborate on mental processes that occurred prior to and during the action.

**During the audio-video recording, significant coaches' interventions were selected, based on the pre-practice interview and the prevalence of the intervention*

Analysis : Once interviews were transcribed, an inductive content analysis was done in order to identify and categorize significant information according to research questions.

5- Results

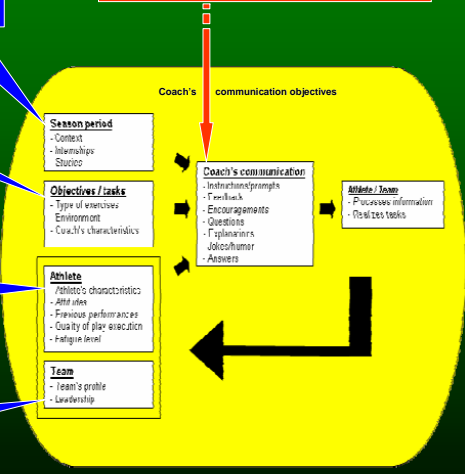
Behaviors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
Instructions/prompts	16	20	15	10	7	8	10	11	11	11	12	10	10	132
Feedback	143	105	117	94	74	68	45	41	34	37	37	37	35	1015
Encouragements	10	12	14	16	20	21	17	19	17	17	17	17	17	185
Questions	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	110
Jokes/humor	5	27	42	38	15	14	20	10	10	10	23	21	14	216
Explanations	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Encouragements	46	72	73	102	28	27	43	39	22	33	35	32	32	589
Questions	24	27	28	25	22	23	24	19	14	19	20	20	20	289
Explanations	15	23	23	20	11	18	20	18	19	24	19	16	16	211
Jokes/humor	4	25	18	10	23	19	4	5	11	6	9	10	21	164
Answer	10	17	15	15	19	16	14	5	10	6	8	8	8	165
Total	342	561	417	416	246	222	257	256	172	206	225	215	203	3024

«This week, practices were optional because of the exam period. There's a lot of fatigue. So, the first goal of this practice was to put the stress away.»

«As the season goes by, I know against which team we will be matched up. Next weekend, we will probably play against [team]. So, this week's practices are planned in function of their defensive and offensive systems.»

«He is a really smart player. He is not that tall for a [position], but he has good results because he is smart. He always thinks positively and he understands what I want from him. He never complains about anything and he is never looking for excuses.»

«As I've said earlier, there is a lack of leadership on this team. But this time, someone got up and said, «let's go guys!» So, I've let him express himself. I want this kind of initiative.»



6- Discussion

a- The results confirm the prevalence of (a) instructions, (b) feedback, (c) encouragements and (d) questions as the most frequent coaching behaviors (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Douge & Hastie, 1993; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Lacy & Goldston, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976).

b- Despite the use of a different behaviors taxonomy, Lacy & Darst (1985) found similar results about the influence of season period on the frequency of feedbacks, questions and instructions.

c- The context also seems to influence coach's interventions, as demonstrated by (a) an increase of jokes' ratio during a non-competitive week and (b) a progressive reduction of specific corrective feedback, which might indicate that the coach does not have to precisely repeat taught.

d- The results also confirm the findings of Trudel et al. (1996) study, that states that coaches use multiple factors in the decision making process prior to their interventions with the athletes. As a matter of fact, different factors influence the coach's communication: (a) season period, (b) season and (c) sessions' objectives and tasks to be accomplished, athlete and team.

7- Conclusion

a- As shown in this study, focusing on the situational context is imperative to gain an in-depth understanding of coaching science because there is not only one way to coach (Cross, 1999; Fairs, 1997).

b- Future studies should be realized with other coaches in order to compare results and therefore, develop the coaching communication model. These studies could be conducted in different disciplines and involve coaches with different levels of expertise. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Jones, Housner & Kornspan (1995) and Trudel et al. (1996), it is essential to use a research method that aims to understand coach's rationale underlying specific interventions in addition to behaviors' analysis. Also, this methodology allows studying the action directly in its situational context.

c- The process used in this study could be reinvested in coaching education programs. Such reflection opportunities could help coaches getting an insight of their coaching efficiency.