

# Using a multi-method research design to study communication in coaching : examples of volleyball and basketball coaches

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## 1- Object of the research

- The present study focuses on coaches' communication toward the players during selected practices in order to prepare for playoff games.
- Communication is defined in this study as « *A continuous bidirectional and dynamic share of thoughts, opinions and significant information between coach and athletes, oriented toward specific ends, using words, writings or other signs* » (Fouss & Tropanar, 1981; Myers & Myers, 1990; Target & Cachelneau, 1990).
- Communication is one of the most important coaching skills (Salmela, 1996) and it contributes to participants' skills development (Target & Cachelneau, 1990), and self perception (Allen & Howe, 1998; Horn, 1985; Smith, Small & Christensen, 1996).

## 2- Literature review

- Coaching Behaviors Efficiency<sup>1</sup> perspective** (Saury, Seave, LeBlanc & Durand, 2002) :
  - Based on systematic observation, (a) instructions, (b) feedback, (c) hustles/encouragements and (d) questions are among the most frequent communication coaching behaviors (Bloom, Grumpton & Anderson, 1999; Dodge & Hastie, 1993; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Lacy & Goldston, 1989; Thapp & Gallimore, 1976).
  - Behaviors patterns are influenced by (a) coaches' success (win-loss record), (b) season period, (c) sport, (d) participants' skill level, (e) coaches' perception of the athletes, (f) coaches' gender and (g) practice versus game context (Bloom et al., 1999; Claxton, 1988; Horn, 1985; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Lacy & Goldston, 1990; Martland & Mannick, 1990; Sindler & Vealey, 1995).

## 2- Literature review (continued)

- Planning and decision making perspective** (Saury et al., 2002) :
  - Coaches usually take into account approximately three (3) factors in their decision making process, based on (a) objective field information (scores), (b) subjective field information (performance) and (c) coaches knowledge from previous experience (athletes' background and profile) (Gilbert, Trudel & Haughan, 1999; Trudel et al., 1996).
  - Coaches modify their plan before and during practices based on (a) their practical knowledge, (b) athletes behaviors, (c) drills nature and development (time, injuries, etc.) (Dempsey & Toddington, 1996).
- 3- Problem**
  - The literature states that « *No stereotypical coaching personality or set of behaviors leads to success in coaching* (Cratty, 1963, p. 299) » ... « *Expertise in coaching is not a function of increasing or decreasing certain behaviors* (Abraham & Collins, 1998, p.68) ». Therefore, behavior assessment has limited contribution to the development of coaching science, being too simplistic (Srean, 1995).
  - Because of coaching complexity (complex cognitive processes are required to make decisions in practice and game situation (Saury et al., 2002) contextual factors must be considered in analyzing coaching such as : (a) coaches' objectives (Franks, Johnson & Sindler, 1988), (b) coaches' concerns (Saury et al., 2002) and (c) players' profile and needs (Dodge & Hastie, 1993).
  - Therefore, to gain an in-depth understanding in coaching science, « *It is imperative that direct observation techniques be supplemented by methods for exploring the thought processes of coaches* (Jones, Housner & Karpman, 1995, p. 203) ».

## 4- 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 depends essentially on circumstances (Saury & Seave, 2004).
- Coaching Model** : The goal of coaching is to develop athletes. Coaches' behaviors are related to (a) organization, (b) training and (c) competition. Those behaviors are influenced by (a) the coaches' personal characteristics, (b) athletes' personal characteristics and development and (c) contextual factors (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995).

## 5- Research Questions

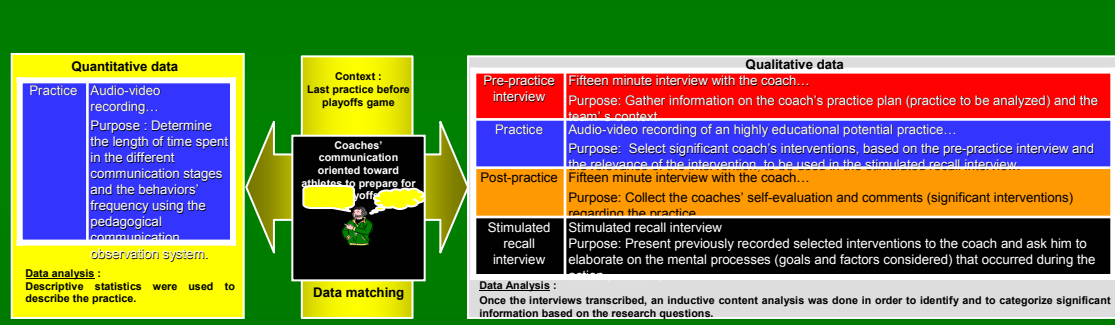
- Based on the stated problem, this study presents an in-depth description of six (6) coaches' communication process toward their athletes during a selected practice designed to prepare them for playoffs games.
- More precisely, the goals are as following :
  - To describe the coaches' verbal communication toward their athletes, showing (a) the length of time devoted to different communication stages and functions and (b) the frequency of behaviors related to communication.
  - To gain an in-depth understanding of the coaches' rationale underlying selected interventions (what are the intent and the factors determining their behaviors?) based on the circumstances.

## 6- Method

### 6.1- Participants and context

Basketball Coaches	David	Frank	Richard
<b>Experience</b>	13 years	9 years	9 years
<b>Level</b>	High School	U15 regional team	High school
<b>Context</b>	36 wins – 2 losses « I am very satisfied with the season... Difficult early in the season... Almost perfect for the last 3 games... Players have improved... »	7 wins – 8 losses « Results - moderately satisfied... Process-wise, very satisfied... 8 out of 12 have improved significantly... Finished 5th, best result so far... »	11 wins - 10 losses « ... Satisfied with the season, considering the team's skill level... Ups and downs... Winning record, good in last stretch... finished second... »
<b>Practice Playoffs game</b>	March 10 <sup>th</sup> March 12-13 <sup>th</sup>	August 2 <sup>nd</sup> August 10-13 <sup>th</sup>	March 16 <sup>th</sup> March 19-20 <sup>th</sup>
Volleyball Coaches	George (VB-G)	Nicolas (VB-N)	Simon (VB-S)
<b>Experience</b>	13 years	18 years	25 years
<b>Level</b>	University	University	College
<b>Context</b>	18 wins – 12 losses « Mostly satisfied, First half good, second half disappointed... Finished third... One game from the CIS Championship participation... »	35 wins – 2 losses « Very good season, we are where we were planned to be early in the season... Preparing for the National Championship... We will go all the way... »	13 wins-3 losses « ... Won the provincial... We have played high level volleyball... We are preparing for the National... A season as expected, overall satisfied... »
<b>Practice Playoffs game</b>	February 21 <sup>st</sup> February 25 <sup>th</sup>	February 23 <sup>rd</sup> March 1-5 <sup>th</sup>	March 4 <sup>th</sup> March 10-12 <sup>th</sup>

### 6.2- Data collection and analysis

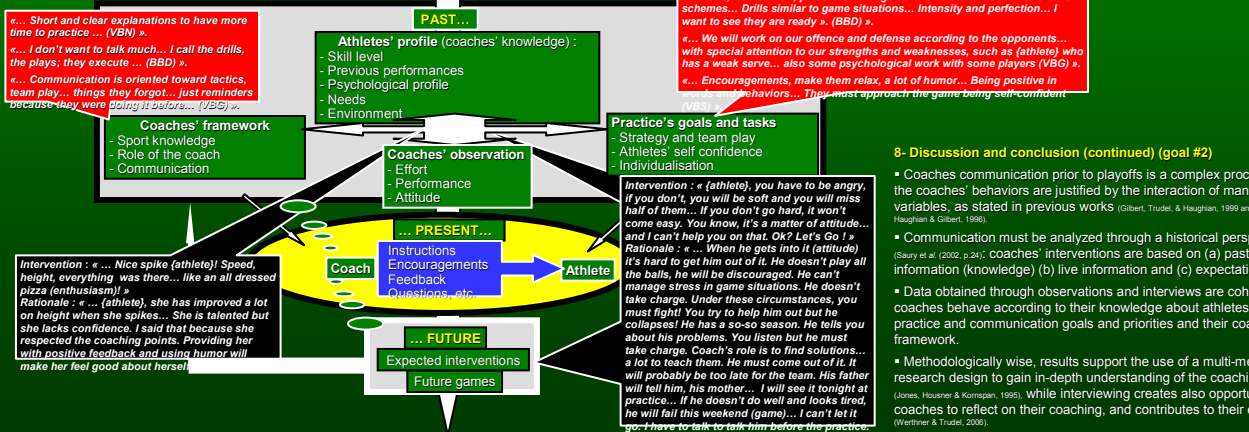


## 7- Results

Goal #1 : Coaches' verbal communication : time devoted to different communication stages and behaviors' frequency.

	BB-D	BB-F	BB-R	VB-G	VB-N	VB-S
Preparation : Explanations, goals, etc.	19%	26%	17%	25%	14%	15%
Realization : Supervision (drills)	80%	73%	78%	70%	82%	72%
Integration : Summary, etc.	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Instructions / prompts (1170)	300	413	150	157	69	81
Encouragements (395)	71	38	26	52	37	171
Positive and general feedback (270)	38	47	49	46	66	24
Questions (221)	28	57	69	33	11	23
Corrective feedback (195)	26	21	40	3	47	58
Explanations (152)	32	35	29	23	14	19
Positive and specific feedback (116)	3	10	34	13	29	27
Jokes/humor (61)	3	4	4	24	1	25
Answers (53)	22	13	7	17	0	0
Justification (56)	6	17	12	21	0	0
Others : other feedback, etc. (291)	44	50	126	37	14	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>448</b>

Goal #2 : Coaches rationale underlying selected interventions (intents and factors considered)



## 8- Discussion and conclusion (goal #1)

- As related to their communication goals, coaches spend most of the practice time to perform different drills.
- Results confirm the literature on the most frequent behaviors : Instructions, feedback, questions, etc. (Saury et al., 2002).
- However, behaviors' profile greatly varies from coach to coach, confirming Cratty (1983) that states that « *No set of behaviors leads to success in coaching* ». For example, Nicolas and Simon present very different behaviors' profiles and have both won their respective National Championships.

## 8- Discussion and conclusion (continued) (goal #2)

- Coaches communication prior to playoffs is a complex process, where the coaches' behaviors are justified by the interaction of many variables, as stated in previous works (Gilbert, Trudel, & Haughan, 1999 and Trudel, Haughan & Gilbert, 1996).
- Communication must be analyzed through a historical perspective (Saury et al., 2002, p.24) : coaches' interventions are based on (a) past information (knowledge) (b) live information and (c) expectations.
- Data obtained through observations and interviews are coherent : coaches behave according to their knowledge about athletes, their practice and communication goals and priorities and their coaching framework.
- Methodologically wise, results support the use of a multi-method research design to gain in-depth understanding of the coaching process (Jones, Housner & Karpman, 1995). While interviewing creates also opportunities for coaches to reflect on their coaching, and contributes to their education (Weinberg & Trudel, 2000).