Designing and Justifying a Training Guide for Coaching in Intercultural Contexts

Tate A. Budnick
Designing and Justifying a Training Guide for Coaching in Intercultural Contexts

Tate A. Budnick

University of Portland

Organizational Communication Senior Capstone Project

April 2018
Abstract

This paper examines and extracts the necessary skills a coach should possess and address to be successful and communicate effectively and appropriately with members of any cultures other than their own. Looking through a broad analysis of past literature, scholars have structured their strategies and expertise that they believe to help a coach be successful. This paper concludes with a self-training tool for coaches to learn the necessary strategies required for a team to be successful.
“I’ve never felt my job was to win basketball games – rather, that the essence of my job as a coach was to do everything I could to give my players the background necessary to succeed in life.”

– Bobby Knight, Basketball

“There’s no question that the thing that’s meant to most is the relationship with my players. All these other things that people talk about, all the championships and being in the select 300-win club, I didn’t even know what that was all about. There’s a great tradition here of being part of something that’s bigger than yourself.”

– Frosty Westering, Football

Introduction

In the 2016-2017 school year, the National Federation of State High School Associations stated nearly eight million students participated in high school athletics (cite?). It is important for researchers to consider coaching all types of teams in all aspects of performance, motivations, and outcomes, since eight million students’ lives are influenced by the coaching they experience in their chosen sport.

When thinking of some of the most successful athletic coaches, in the past 50 years, people such as Vince Lombardi, Bear Bryant, John Wooden, Pat Summit, Bobby Knight, and Frosty Westering (my personal favorite), I note that none had the same coaching style as the others, though they all likely overlapped in some key ways, some of which are important for coaching in intercultural contexts. This project examines existing knowledge about coaching
communication, team bonding, and competent intercultural communication on its way to proposing guidelines for coaching in U.S. intercultural contexts.

Specifically, this report is intended to offer and justify a self-training tool to ease and improve the work of coaches working in intercultural contexts, regardless of sport. This self-training guide was constructed to fill a growing educational need for coaches around the U.S. who need to train and spur the best out of the athletes in increasingly diverse configurations and settings. The report will begin with a review of the literature concerning coaching communication, team cohesion and bonding, and competent intercultural communication. After reviewing the literature I am creating training needs based on the literature. Following the training needs report is rounded out with the references and then the appendix.

**Literature Review**

**Coaching Communication**

A coach’s role is to: plan, observe, provide feedback based on their knowledge in the sport, also with their knowledge, they are entrusted with helping to improve performance (Millar, Oldham, Renshaw, & Hopkins, 2017). Not all coaches have the same knowledge, or give the same feedback, and there are many types of different coaching styles, however effectiveness among teams directly correlates with the coaching communication. Coaching communication is: how a manager/coach is communicating amongst the members of their team, how they value feedback, relationships between coaches and athletes, and support and instruction. “The ability of being able to effectively enact verbal and nonverbal, interpersonal and instructional messages is key to the success of the team” (Watson, 2011).

Feedback is very effective amongst managers and their subordinates, and coaches and their athletes. Feedback, guidance, facilitation, and inspiration need to be ongoing for the group
and/or team to be effective. Subordinates and athletes think more highly of coaches and managers when receiving feedback. In a recent study, Steelman and Wolfeld (2018) examined feedback from managers to subordinates to see its effectiveness. Through employee perceptions of coaching behaviors, coaching relationships, and the environment in which feedback is given, managers were seen as better coaches for their high feedback orientation. Evaluative feedback and technical instruction are key interactions between coaches and players, thus leading to a great effect on self-concept development in athletes (Watson, 2011).

The quality of relationships and the personal connections athletes have with their coaches are essential because this influences how well an athlete communicate with his/her coach, as well as the personal connection allowing the athlete to trust in the coach’s decisions. By being approachable and accepting what the athletes say, communication with coaches is viewed as a valuable orchestration strategy (Raabe, Readdy, & Zakrajsek, 2017). This strategy however does shows varying success due to coaches being perceived as not open to discuss athletes’ concerns (Raabe, Readdy, & Zakrajsek, 2017).

By coaches building relationships with their athletes, being open with them and hearing their concerns, the coach and athlete are going to see better involvement/buy in, better team cohesion and better attitudes from the athletes. Cranmer and Buckner performed a study of high school athletes and their relationships with their coaches and other teammates. Cranmer and Buckner (2017) suggest that social and cultural environments around sporting interactions are important to understand for the betterment of the team’s success. As a general theme in the study done by Watson (2011), the athletes cherished the relationship with their coach, respected the coach’s authority, valued their coaches opinion, and looked to coaches for their expertise. Coaches who have been coaching for a while, or have had a group of athletes for a period of
time, will often know which methods work and which don’t (i.e., screaming, yelling, aggressiveness, etc.), but methods can differ from person to person. Athletes who receive social support from their coaches reported that the received pertinent information from head coaches was communicated more effectively. Athletes were more satisfied with their coaches when they receive less emotional distress and receive messages that reinforced self-worth (Cranmer & Sollitto, Sport Support: Received Social Support as a Predictor of Athlete Satisfaction, 2015). These positive results explain why getting to know the athlete and building relationships, coaches are better able to determine what methods work best for the team and each individual.

**Team Cohesion and Bonding**

Bettering relationships among athlete-coach and athlete-athlete will produce better cohesion amongst the whole team. Team cohesion is a very important part of athletes’ satisfaction (Turman, 2008). It’s that sense of an individual feeling a belonging to a group. It is argued by scholars that an important role of the coach is to promote team cohesion because a team’s cohesive level effects individual group member behavior and further enhances team performance. This also derives from the relationships coaches have with athletes and would like them to implement this behavior with each other, even in the midst of inevitable disagreements between coaches and players.

To better team cohesion and culture, goal setting is a very positive activity for a team to engage in. Goal setting produces positive relationships athlete to athlete and athlete to coach because teammates then enhance the team’s focus and it allows the athletes to work toward the same goals. While working towards the same goals, teammates tend to push each other to the height of their ability while increasing enjoyment and athlete satisfaction. This strong bond
enhances players’ efforts in practice allowing the athletes worry about their own game instead of worrying about if their teammate is working hard or not (Raabe, Readdy, & Zakrajsek, 2017).

A key component to building great team cohesion and bonding amongst members of the team are relationships built between athlete to athlete and athlete to coach. Cranmer and Bucker (2017) performed a study researching athletes’ expressions of dissent. Dissent is the expression of disagreement of policies, procedures and practices (Cranmer & Buckner, 2017). According to Cranmer and Buckner (2017), when there is disagreement on a team, dissent happens in three ways depending on relationships: upward dissent, lateral dissent, and displaced dissent. Upward dissent is disagreement that is expressed towards management, coaches, supervisors, etc. Lateral dissent is disagreement that is expressed towards your teammates, peers, coworkers, etc. Displaced dissent is disagreement that is expressed to others who are not a part of the organization, for example family and friends (Cranmer & Buckner, 2017). Dissent is manageable, and is why coaches’ relationships with their athletes, and relationships athlete to athlete are very important in an organization. Dissent can be successfully managed by coaches ensuring to their athletes, that they are able to voice disagreement to the coaches, instead of expressing their dissent elsewhere – lateral & displaced. Coaches express the knowledge to further explain, and the power to alter an organizations policies, procedures, and practices (Cranmer & Buckner, 2017), which is why relationships expressing openness and feedback between a coach and their athletes encourage the athletes to dissent to coaches. Relationships built between coaches to athlete and athlete to athlete promote great team cohesion. If these types of relationships are expressed, lateral dissent can be positive as well. Where the best type of dissent is upward, an athlete who expresses dissent laterally in a socially cohesive group, it is a positive return based on the culture expressed by the coach.
Competent Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication competence is important to understand when discussing successful coaching across cultural lines. Competent intercultural communication is showing the necessary knowledge and skills of what it takes to interact effectively and appropriately with members from different cultures in their organization (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Someone who is uprooted from his or her familiar setting and culture and arrives in a new unfamiliar culture can experience culture shock. This can be an intimidating and stressful time in the individual’s life as it seems identity is stripped of all protection and what they know, (Knapp & Daly, 2011). To help an individual overcome a time like this, befriend the individual and be supportive. Knapp and Daly (2011) state that intercultural and interpersonal research suggests meaningful close friendship ties counteract stressful life events. To sustain and develop close friendship ties, the individuals must self-disclose to each other (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Self-disclosure allows individuals to become very close with each other by sharing intimate details of their life.

Application: Training Needs Based on Literature

Training Objectives for Developing a Deeper Understanding

*Information gathering for deeper knowledge of one’s own culture.* The first thing that must be done before learning about other peoples’ culture, is to assess one’s own culture and gain a deeper knowledge. By assessing and gaining a deeper knowledge of one’s own culture, it gives better insight as to why someone is the way they way she/he is based on one’s own cultural norms, values and beliefs. Taking a step back after assessing one’s own culture gives great excitement to dive into why another culture norms are the way they are and why people act the way they do.
**Information gathering for deeper knowledge of a foreign culture.** After diving into a deeper understanding of one’s own culture, and figuring out one’s own cultural values the next step in the guidelines is to get to know the athletes, connect with them, learn about their families, their likes/dislikes, their hobbies, anything to get on a deeper more emotional level with the athlete. Then learn about the athletes’ cultures, their cultural norms and values. Dive deep to really understand where the athlete comes from and how amazing that culture is. Personal connections made with the coach and the athletes are essential. It helps the athletes better communicate with the coaches and gives the athletes more trust in the coach’s decision.

**Training Objectives for Building Relationships**

**Communication.** Once the coach is now comfortable learning about culture and the athletes, the coach is then going to build relationships with the athletes. Relationship building was already started when learning about each other’s cultures, but now relationships are being built on a much deeper level.

To successfully build relationships, coaches need to be honest, approachable, and be there for social support for their athletes (Cranmer & Sollitto, Sport Support: Received Social Support as a Predictor of Athlete Satisfaction, 2015). Coaches need to give great feedback to their players, give guidance, and be open-minded.

**Training Objectives for Building Team Cohesion**

**Working toward the same goals.** Positive relationships that teammates share enhances the team’s focus. This allows the members of the team to work towards the same goal, and push each other to these goals, which thus increases enjoyment amongst the team. This bond enhances players’ efforts in practice, which leads to a great performance and competition on the field/court/pitch etc.
Once a coach has completed and implemented the guidelines, they now should be and feel more competent in that intercultural situation. The first step is to make sure the user is 100% knowledgeable in the sport she/he is going to coach. To connect with other cultures, the coach must follow the second step by first understanding more about his/her own culture’s key values, beliefs, and norms on a deeper level. Then, step three, get to know the athletes on the team and, step four, learn about each of their cultures’ key values, beliefs, and norms. Step five involves building relationships with the athletes. Personal connections and quality relationships from coach to athlete allows the athlete to have more trust in the coaches decisions, as well as communicate more effectively. Steps six, seven, and eight have the athletes build relationships with each other so they can create goals and build great team cohesion and culture. Steps nine and ten are to make sure the coach never settles with their team, but always continues checking and striving for richer cultural understandings, in addition to the personal understandings they’re developing with each individual. They need to always be learning, whether that is about their players, cultures, sport; they can always learn and grow as they keep on teaching the athletes.
References


Appendix 1

**Training Guide for Coaching in Intercultural Contexts**

1. Learn the game.
   a. A coach must learn the game and have knowledge in that sport to be able to help improve performance of the athletes.

2. Obtain a deeper understanding of your own culture.
   a. You must first assess and better understand your own culture.

3. Get to know your athletes.
   a. Connect with your athletes.
   b. Learn where they are from/what their culture is.
   c. Learn about their family (mother, father, brothers, sisters, etc.).

4. Obtain a deeper understanding of their culture.
   a. This allows you to get a deeper understanding of said cultures’ values and beliefs (if not already shared) to connect on a deeper level.

5. Build relationships with athletes.
   a. By sharing intimate information about values and beliefs you are already building relationships with the athletes.
   b. Be honest.
   c. Be approachable.
      i. open communication policy.
   d. Be there for social support.
      i. emotional
      ii. esteem
iii. informational

iv. tangible

e. Be open-minded.
   i. Not one athlete is the same as the other.
   ii. Listen to the athlete and work with the individual to come up with the best possible solution for them.

f. Give great feedback.

g. Give guidance.
   i. athletically
   ii. emotionally
   iii. physically

6. Have athletes build relationships with each other.
   a. Build relationships same way.

7. Establish team goals.
   a. Set and write goals down as a team of what they want to accomplish.
   b. Goal setting produces great team cohesion

8. Great relationships between coach-athlete and athlete-athlete create great team culture and great team cohesion.
   a. This enhances team’s focus.
   b. Allows athletes to work toward same goal while pushing each other.
   c. Increased enjoyment.

Keep learning and growing your cultural knowledge; keep teaching the athletes.