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Coaching Mental Model: A qualitative investigation of coaching concepts of expert coaches in Japan

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The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of coaching concepts of professional coaches in Japan. Fifteen professional coaches served as participants for this study. In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with twenty coaches, and the data. The inductive analysis process resulted in regrouping these interview transcripts into three categories which show a significant agreement between coaches' perceptions of the concepts on how they evaluated their coaching activities in relation to performance enhancement of the players and how the role of deliberate practice affects the development of expertise in Japan: 1) empowering, 2) directing, and 3) organizing. For example, the requirement of task analysis and rationalizing training were essential parts of deliberate practice. In addition, it is important to explain the vision and to keep physical and human resources in good condition to direct the players to go through deliberate practice and attain their ultimate goal. The strong relationship between empowering, directing, and organizing indicates that coaches direct players to deliberate practice as a way of overcoming the three constraints for talent development: motivation, effort, and resource.

Key words: coaching mental model, performance enhancement, deliberate practice

The development of Exceptional performance is believed to result from prolonged deliberate practice across a period of at least 10 years (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer, 1993). Ericsson et al. suggest that athletes are made not born, and that success is a function of the amount of deliberate practice one has accumulated (1993). Deliberate practice is defined by Ericsson et al. as follows: "Deliberate practice includes activities that have been specially designed to improve the current level of performance" (1993). Deliberate practice is distinguished from work and play. "In contrast to play, deliberate practice is a highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance. (...) We claim that deliberate practice requires effort and it not inherently enjoyable. Individuals are motivated to practice because practice improves performance" (1993). The four characteristics of deliberate practice are

stated in outline form as follows (Hodge and Deakin, 1998); 1) there is a direct, positive relationship between the level of expertise and the amount of deliberate practice. 2) deliberate practice activities elicit maximal improvements in performance. 3) deliberate practice activities are effortful, and thus can only be sustained for limited amount of time due to fatigue. 4) while deliberate practice activities are considered to be highly relevant to performance, they are not inherently enjoyable.

In this context, Salmela (1996) suggests that the most important role of the coach is to make the athletes center their efforts upon deliberate practice and to minimize the resource, effort and motivational constraints. The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of coaching concepts of professional coaches in Japan taking into account their coaching philosophy in relation

to deliberate practice.

Methods

Participants

Twenty successful coaches in Japan Sport Association served as participants for this study including four youth soccer coaches, six professional soccer coaches, one high school canoe coach, one high school basketball coach, one university baseball coach, one university table tennis coach, two professional figure skating coaches, two professional gymnastics coaches, one professional swimming coach and one professional racket ball coach. Their average age was 41.2 years old. They had an average age of 10.5 years of coaching. They all had experience playing as athletes in National Level. Some of the staff of Japan Sport Association provided additional information concerning the status of these successful coaches in Japan.

Data Collection

In-depth, open-ended interviews were used to gather data from the twenty coaches. Interviews took approximately 60 to 120 minutes. Interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants, and systematically transcribed verbatim from the audio data immediately after the completion of each interview.

Data Analyses

The interview data was decontextualized using an inductive procedure for analyzing unstructured qualitative data (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). Each interview transcript was read carefully by two investigators. The electric organization of the data using ISOP facilitated the interpretation of the results by keeping a systematic classification of each meaning unit and its source.

Results and Discussion

The inductive analysis process resulted in

regrouping these interview transcripts into three categories which show a significant agreement between coaches' perceptions of the concepts on how they evaluated their coaching activities in relation to performance enhancement of the players and how the role of deliberate practice affects the development of expertise in Japan: 1) empowering (self-absorbing, self-managing, enjoyment), 2) directing (goal setting, analyzing, assigning, rationalizing, feedback), and 3) organizing (mental support, management).

1. *Empowering*

Strong self-absorbed experience which player feel during performing was important for fueling the motivational resources in all levels. For example, strong flow experience which player feel during play was important for fueling the motivational resources in all levels as illustrated by these coaches:

Of course training is tough and hard. Players must go through it to improve their performance. But the coach has to make training with due regard to the enjoyment of swimming. It is not mere fun or good feelings, but a pleasant sensation or self-absorbed experience, like coming up with various ideas to know the knack of the skills, which is an essential part of sport. (Swimming)

I think one of the important things in coaching is that a coach should give a chance for players to think and identify their weak points. This helps players to focus and concentrate during practice, and as a result, players have more of a chance to have self-fulfillment and reach a self-managing experience. (Gymnastic A)

Figure 1 shows the process of "empowering" in which coaches direct players to get an idea to enhance their performance by themselves.

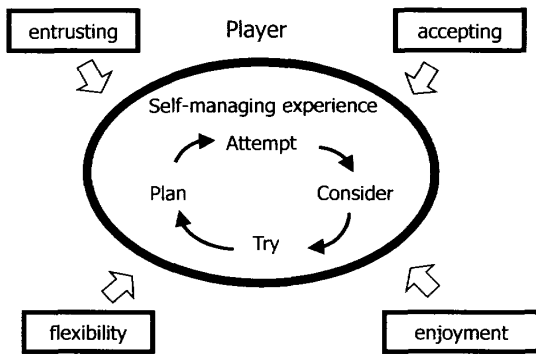


Figure 1: The Process of Empowering

2. Directing

It is important to get players to do what they do not want to accomplish the utmost extent in a practice. The requirement of task analysis and rationalizing training were essential parts of deliberate practice. The drills designed for the players were a source of effortful, continuous training as illustrated by some coaches.

I agree with the importance of self-direction of players. But sometimes, a player does not know what to do in order to achieve what he / she wants to achieve. In this case, the coach has to set a task for player to do and reinforce it, even if the player is not quite satisfied with this task. (Basketball)

I always make players check their performance with our team check list before we start practice. It is necessary to analyze task and to rationalize training for an efficient practice. (Canoe)

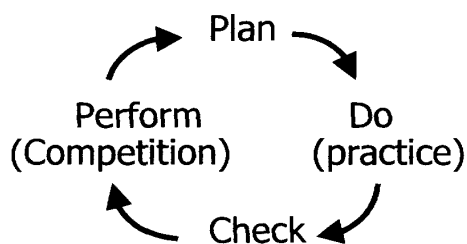


Figure 2: The Process of Directing

Figure 2 shows the process of “Directing” in which coaches direct players to commit dairy effortful drill to enhance their performance.

3. Organizing

The requirement of mental support was essential part of deliberate practice. It is important to keep physical and human resources in good condition to direct players and the team to go through deliberate practice and to attain their ultimate goals as illustrated by these coaches.

Even with professional teams, the physical and human resources such as a proper training ground, clubhouse, funds, and support staff are sufficient. I always try to find a chance to get more rich resources for our players so that they can concentrate on daily hard practice. (Soccer A)

I always ask my assistant coach to care for the mental health of players. That is an important part of coaching, too. (Table tennis)

General Discussion

Expert coaches evaluated their coaching activities in relation to performance enhancement of each player. Also expert coaches identify that the role of deliberate practice affects the

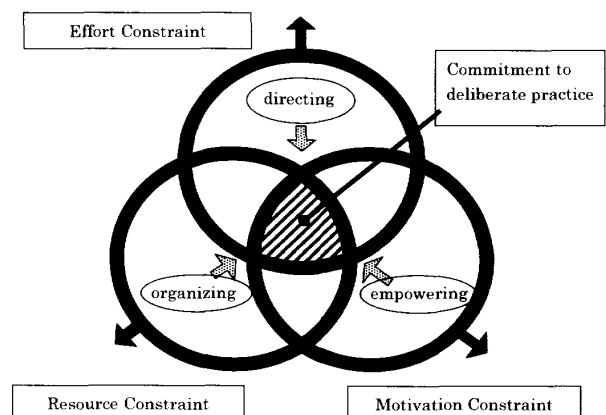


Fig. 3: A Model of Perception of Coaching Concepts

development of expertise in Japan. Figure 3 shows the model of perception of coaching concepts in Japan. Directing is a factor of coaching concepts to minimize mainly the effort constraint. Goal-setting, analyzing, rationalizing, feedback, and assigning are main characteristic of directing. Empowering is a factor of coaching concepts to minimize mainly the motivation constraint. Entrusting, enjoyment, and flexibility are main characteristic of empowering. Organizing is a factor of coaching concepts to minimize mainly the resource constraint. Mental support and managing are main characteristic of organizing.

Conclusion

The strong relationship between empowering, directing, and organizing indicates that coaches direct players to commit to deliberate practice as a way of overcoming the three constraints for talent development: motivation, effort, and resources.

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異なるスポーツ競技種目のエキスパート・コーチを対象とした コーチング・コンセプトの定性的分析

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Ericsson 等 (1993) は、スポーツ、音楽、芸術、科学等、様々な領域における卓越したパフォーマンスが、10 年以上に渡って継続的に蓄積された合理的で構造的な練習 (deliberate practice) によるとする研究成果を報告している。この合理的で構造的な練習とは、「現在のパフォーマンスを向上させることのみが目的とされた活動」であり、「高度に構造化されており、楽しみを伴わないが故に遊びとは区別され」、また「直接的な報酬を伴わないため仕事とは異なる活動」と定義づけられている (Ericsson 等、1993)。

こうした「熟達化」解釈の文脈の中で、視点を卓越したパフォーマーから指導者へと移した場合、指導者の役割は「選手が合理的な構造的練習に専心するよう様々な阻害要因を取り除くこと」にあると考えられる (Salmela, 1996)。本稿の目的は、異なるスポーツ競技種目の日本人エキスパートコーチを対象とし、彼等彼女等がもつコーチング・コンセプトを定性的に掘り起こし分析することにある。

20 名のコーチを対象に一人約 90 分間、1 対 1 の半構造的自由回答的調査面接を実施した。調査面接後直ちに作成されたトランスクリプト・データをもとに、Côté 等 (1993) による定性的データ分析法を用いた分析作業を行った結果、empowering (自己統制への委譲)、directing (目的達成への教示)、および organizing (環境設定) の 3 つの大カテゴリーが抽出された。各カテゴリーの分析結果から、異なる競技種目の日本人エキスパート・コーチは選手の卓越性獲得に向け、選手自身による自己統制を形成すると同時に、コーチ自身による徹底した目的追求を合理的に追求し、選手と指導者を取り巻く環境を最大限改善していくという構図が明らかにされた。そこでは環境、動機づけ、および専心性の 3 領域に存在する卓越性獲得の阻害要因を最小限にとどめ、合理的で構造的な練習に選手が継続的に専心できるよう具体的な行動が発揮されている点を確認された。