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What makes them so good? The constructs used by coaches to identify coaching prowess

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22 Abstract

23 The criterion which coaches use to judge their peers are extremely pertinent to the study and
24 enhancement of coach development. The aim of this two-part study was to offer insight into
25 how a sample of British sub-elite coaches judged coaching prowess and perceived the nature
26 of the expertise possessed (or perceived to be possessed) by their own self-selected role
27 model coaches. Data from field notes and transcribed conversations with 143 coaches,
28 drawn from over 15 years of conversations, were interpreted following an inductive analysis.
29 Subsequently, follow up focus group interviews involving 15 level three coaches in a range
30 of sports were used to augment and, if appropriate, question these data. Results yielded an
31 array of personal characteristics, which participants used to describe "what" role model
32 coaches did or were like, as opposed to professional or behavioural characteristics that
33 explained "how" they worked. Consideration of these findings offers some areas for
34 immediate exploitation, alongside some key concerns which must be addressed if the trend
35 for social learning based coach development initiatives are to have optimum benefit.

36 *Keywords:* coach education; coach development; coach learning

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47 What makes them so good? The constructs used by coaches to identify coaching prowess

48 During the last 30 years, there has been considerable growth in the provision of coach
49 education initiatives as a means to raise coaching standards, alongside a growing drive to
50 establish coaching as a bona fide profession (Taylor & McEwan, 2012). Typically, a model
51 of formal coach education has emerged that encompasses standardised curricula of theoretical
52 and cognitive knowledge, often designed against a "gold standard" of effective coaching that
53 learners must mimic (Abraham & Collins, 1998). More recently however, the coaching
54 research literature has suggested that the impact of such initiatives is limited, and that the
55 majority of coach development in fact occurs outside of formal educational settings through
56 informal and non-formal learning experiences and sources (cf. Cushion et al., 2010).

57 As a result of coaches' apparent preference for informal development when learning
58 how to coach, a growing body of coaching research has begun to highlight a social theory of
59 learning in the development of coaching knowledge and practice (e.g., Culver & Trudel,
60 2006; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009). Similarly,
61 coach education programmes have begun to acknowledge learning as a social activity and
62 embrace the value and benefits of informal approaches to development that encourage on-
63 going social interaction (Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie, 2006; Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel,
64 2009; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). For example, the importance of coach mentoring is
65 frequently discussed and mentoring schemes are commonly established by National
66 Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) outside of formal learning settings (Cushion, 2006; UK
67 Sport, 2013). Similarly, Wenger's (1998) concept of learning within a "Community of
68 Practice" (CoP) is increasingly cited as a mode of facilitating coach development (e.g.,
69 Callary, 2013; Cassidy et al., 2006; Culver & Trudel, 2006; Culver, Trudel, & Werthner,
70 2009). These methods of development clearly hold potential for the developers of coaches;
71 however, there remains a paucity of research examining the social influences that underpin

72 them and which subsequently impact upon the development of coaching knowledge
73 (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014).

74 Consider, for example, the social environment within which coaches create
75 knowledge and attribute meaning to what they learn (Callary, 2013). This environment is
76 extremely complex, and individuals are faced with a diverse range of influences, many of
77 which they may not be consciously aware of, which pressure them to behave in certain ways
78 in order to conform and secure approval (Bowes & Jones, 2006; Collins, Abraham, &
79 Collins, 2012; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014). This social "milieu", in which a developing
80 coach is inevitably embedded, can incorporate a wide range of significant others and multiple
81 stakeholders (e.g., athletes, administrators, peers, role models, parents, policy makers,
82 NGBs), who may all be working to varying agendas, with competing egos and within
83 complex hierarchies (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004). In addition, the pervasive roots and
84 influence of socio-cultural values and tradition in sports run deep, and many elements of
85 knowledge and coaching practice remain largely guided by tradition and historical
86 precedence in the sport (Cushion, Ford, & Williams, 2012; Williams & Hodges, 2005). As a
87 result, the subtleties of this milieu are a powerful source in promoting and perpetuating the
88 value and acceptance of certain types of knowledge and behaviour over others (Cushion,
89 Armour, & Jones, 2003) and guiding what coaches choose to pay attention to as well as what
90 they choose to learn (Werthner & Trudel, 2006). For example, the "best" ways to structure
91 practice and behaviour are explicitly repeated and reinforced in the testimony of more
92 experienced "fellow" coaches, retired coaches, and ex-athletes. In addition, the sports media
93 may "sell" or promote certain ideological interpretations and coaching values, which may
94 either compliment or contradict the extant or dominant values.

95 As such, if the right messages are (a) being sent, (b) being received, and (c) are
96 genuinely correct, then subsequently integrated with practice in an appropriate context, the

97 social milieu might be a highly efficient and effective tool for coach development, either
98 solely or in tandem with other approaches. However, this is at best a "triple whammy"
99 assumption, and, as of yet, there has been limited research examining these processes in
100 detail. Consequently, before we can strategize ways of improving informal methods of coach
101 development, we first need to understand and consider more critically the processes already
102 taking place as coaches learn their craft (Occhino, Mallett, & Rynne, 2013). For example, if
103 we wish to avoid coaching practice being guided by uncritical inertia, and similarly prevent
104 out-dated knowledge and behaviours being passed on and reproduced during informal
105 development activities such as CoPs (Cushion et al., 2012), we need to look at the constructs
106 that the existing social milieu uses to judge coaching quality. As such, the criterion which
107 coaches use to judge their peers are extremely pertinent to the study of coach learning and
108 development.

109 Firstly, these criteria form part of the received wisdom and social schematics used by
110 coaches to establish pecking orders and mutual reinforcement (Ritzer, 1996; Wacquant,
111 1998). As such, identification and exploitation of these criteria can provide coach developers
112 with some useful tools. Secondly, the constructs used by coaches will play a key role in the
113 development of social schema (as described excellently by Bowes & Jones, 2006). These
114 structures are created as a result of past interpersonal experiences and have a powerful
115 influence on current behaviour. For example, the acceptance of new information in any
116 learning experience will be dependent on its compatibility with a coach's existing schemas
117 (Nassaji, 2002). An understanding of the constructs used by coaches could therefore help
118 uncover how coaches develop a mental framework for their behaviour (Baldwin, 1992) and,
119 subsequently, a great deal about the priorities for attention in raising coaching standards
120 within and across sports. Thirdly, monitoring and regularly revisiting these schemas can
121 offer a genuine and impactful measure of progress. In driving through change, administrators

147 The insights presented are based on field notes and transcribed conversations
148 collected by the second author from a convenience sample of 143 coaches of (by present day
149 standards) level three status (Sports Coach UK, 2012). As such, all the coaches were sub-
150 elite but experienced coaches acknowledged by their respective sports as being capable of
151 autonomous practice. The coaches used in generating the data included 105 male ($M_{age} =$
152 42.4 years, $SD = 5.8$) and 38 female ($M_{age} = 39$ years, $SD = 7.4$) coaches from a range of
153 sports. The breakdown was as follows:

- 154 • 31 athletics
- 155 • 29 rugby (union or league)
- 156 • 16 tennis
- 157 • 13 judo
- 158 • 13 canoeing
- 159 • 11 karate
- 160 • 9 hockey
- 161 • 8 curling
- 162 • 7 Olympic weight lifting

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164 The remaining six (making up the total of 143 participants) perceived themselves as
165 multi-sport coaches albeit with a good level of perceived (or at least certified) coaching
166 prowess. All participants were UK citizens or had been domicile in the UK for a minimum
167 of five years. The median coaching experience was reported as 12 years, with experience
168 ranging from 6 to over 40 years. All recruitment was by personal contact, with complete
169 anonymity guaranteed; an assertion reinforced by the informal/visiting presenter roles held by
170 the author when data were collected.

171 **Procedure**

172 In all cases, responses were made to the question "why is Coach X such a good
173 coach?" where Coach X was the "role model" identified by the coach from his or her own
174 sports domain. The question was posed by the second author at the beginning of coach
175 education courses as part of an informal needs assessment and in order to ascertain course
176 participants' beliefs and schemas surrounding "effective" coaching. Consequently, this

177 process offered the second author clues on how he might present participants with subsequent
178 exemplars and facts to best effect during the course.

179 Responses were wide ranging and often rambling but, with the imperatives employed
180 for neither self-presentation nor hidden agendas, we are satisfied that the responses were
181 genuine. This trustworthiness was further enhanced by the use of triangulation (Patton, 2002)
182 using participant responses from other settings (e.g., group discussions) and member
183 checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) whereby field note summaries were shared with
184 participants and confirmed as realistically reflecting their views (see also Sparkes, 1998).

185 **Data Analysis**

186 An inductive analysis of the raw data was carried out following the procedures
187 described by Côté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993) for organising and interpreting
188 unstructured qualitative data. First, to increase familiarity, the field note summaries were
189 read several times by both authors before being analysed line by line to identify and label
190 meaning units (i.e., raw coach quotations of varying length that exemplify a meaningful
191 thought, point, or piece of information). This allowed for thick description to be reflected in
192 the results (Creswell, 2003). The meaning units were then listed before being compared for
193 similarities and grouped into distinct categories referred to as lower order themes (Côté et al.,
194 1993). Finally, the analysis proceeded to a higher level of abstraction, whereby the lower
195 order themes that had emerged from the data were grouped into larger and more general
196 higher order themes in a higher order concept. This process allowed for the constant
197 refinement of the results until theoretical saturation occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

198 To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the two authors, both of whom are
199 experienced researchers in qualitative methods, discussed the meaning units, categories and
200 themes at each stage until a consensus of opinion was reached on their accuracy and clarity.
201 Following the recommendations of Krane, Andersen, and Streat (1997), a reliability check

202 was also conducted by asking an independent investigator, trained in qualitative methodology
203 but blind to the objectives of the study, to audit the assigned categories and themes to ensure
204 that they accurately reflected coach quotations. This discourse resulted in a high level of
205 agreement between individuals, with only a small number of minor discrepancies requiring
206 adjustment or further rationale.

207 **Phase Two**

208 **Participants**

209 For the second phase of the study, participants ($N = 15$) were purposively selected
210 (Patton, 2002) using criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this regard, the
211 coaches were required to possess the level three qualification provided by their respective
212 NGB, therefore reflecting the overall makeup of the coaches in phase one. All coaches were
213 male UK citizens ($M_{age} = 37$ years, $SD = 7.6$). The median coaching experience was
214 reported as 11 years, with experience ranging from 6 to over 30 years.

215 **Procedure**

216 Prior to data collection, the study received ethical approval from a university research
217 ethics committee. Once participants had returned a signed informed consent form, three focus
218 group interviews were moderated by the first author: one group with 4 hockey and 3 rugby
219 league coaches, one with 5 golf coaches, and one with 3 squash coaches. Reflecting the
220 procedure employed in phase one, coach groups were asked to consider their own personal
221 role model, defined as "a coach who, in your experience, characterises what you would aspire
222 to be in your coaching." As before, the main question asked was "why is Coach X such a
223 good coach?" Reflecting recommendations for the administration of focus groups
224 (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), open-ended prompts were used to encourage participants
225 to expand upon their ideas and evocate rich discussion. Elaboration and clarification probes
226 were also used to help ensure that clear and comprehensive descriptions were elicited

227 (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Patton, 2002). Typically, these probes involved the moderator
228 giving a summary of a point a coach had made and asking them to offer additional detail
229 (e.g., "Why do you think that is the case?") or examples (e.g., "Can you provide the group
230 with a specific example of that?"). Otherwise, conversations were allowed to proceed freely,
231 with all focus groups lasting approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded
232 and then transcribed verbatim, with transcripts checked twice against the audio recording to
233 ensure accuracy. To enhance credibility, the word-processed interview transcript was
234 emailed to each participant for checking. This form of member checking (Patton, 2002) gave
235 the participants the opportunity for reflexive elaboration (Sparkes, 1989) and the chance to
236 comment on and clarify the meaning of their responses to ensure an accurate representation
237 of their views had been obtained. No changes were requested.

238 **Data Analysis**

239 In this case, manipulation of the unstructured interview data were aided through the
240 use of a qualitative data analysis software package (QSR NVivo 10). The raw data were
241 again submitted to an inductive content analysis and followed the same process as outlined in
242 phase one of the study. Lastly, participants were sent a summary of results and asked to
243 provide feedback on their accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2003). No changes were
244 requested and the emergent lower and higher order themes were acknowledged as providing
245 an accurate representation of expressed coaches' views.

246 **Results**

247 **Phase One**

248 For presentation purposes, the themes that emerged from the inductive content
249 analysis are shown in Table 1. What follows is a brief and selective summary of the
250 generally expressed perceptions. Quotes are used to enable the reader to gain a better
251 appreciation of the context in which the themes emerge from the data.

252 Knowledge and experience

253 Participants commented on their role model's knowledge base, most notably and
254 frequently in the sport-specific area. In particular, the ability to come up with "tidy" answers
255 quickly was noted. For example, a rugby coach said "he is a great walking resource...he will
256 almost always provide a practical solution" while a canoeing coach described the importance
257 of "knowing" when to change tack as necessary:

258 He seems to have an uncanny knack for knowing when something isn't going to
259 work...he will persist and persist, often much longer than is reasonable. At what
260 always seems to be the right time however, he will drop it and go with a new idea.

261 Certainly, for many participants, the previous experiences of the role model as a high level
262 performer were seen as an extremely positive feature. For example, an athletics coach said
263 "been there; seen it, done it, got the T-shirt. Whatever the situation throws at him, X...and
264 therefore his athletes know what to do." For others, however, a coach's previous limitations
265 as a performer were seen as an advantage. A rugby coach was adamant that "because X had
266 to work so hard to get there, he really understands and caters for the challenges his players
267 face. They can have confidence that he understands..."

268 Communication

269 Clarity of expectation was seen as a desirable feature of role model coaches. A
270 weightlifting coach said "X is a hard bastard. The athletes know where they stand and what
271 he expects. They tend not to f*** about." Similarly, another rugby coach described the
272 selection process implemented by their model coach and how that is communicated to their
273 players:

274 All X's players know where they stand in the pecking order, what they need to
275 demonstrate to move up, and the things they need to do to make that happen...he will
276 always let you know where you stand. Selection is no longer a mystery.

277 The ability of role model coaches to communicate instructions and information in a clear and
278 unambiguous way was also viewed as a key quality. For example, a hockey coach felt that:

279 The way he presents stuff is really good. Calmly and methodically he exposes the
280 plan so the team are taken along with it. Questions are asked and counters made so, at
281 the end of the meetings, everyone is confident in the master plan.

282 More specifically, participants consistently alluded to the utility of analogy as a method to
283 deliver instructions and information clearly. A curling coach commented "one of his best
284 features is the use of little stories, stick diagrams or examples from real-life...he can bring an
285 idea to life, make it relevant and understandable." This view was also reported by several
286 individual sport coaches, including a tennis coach who said "she will always try to relate
287 ideas through examples or stories. It gets the message across really well." Alongside this,
288 almost all the participants referred to their model's ability to make comparisons with the
289 historic or current performance of world-class performers or coaches in order to make their
290 point. For example, a rugby coach explained "he will use contrasts with world class players
291 to justify his advice...Jonny does it like this but if you had watched Jenks..."

292 Models were also seen as being adept at portraying confidence when communicating
293 the decisions they had taken. A hockey coach stated "the players never seem in any doubt
294 that X has got it taped. He doesn't show doubt publicly and they don't doubt his decision."
295 Nevertheless, it was clear that, while overt confidence was seen as an essential component of
296 the role model coach, the social construction of this was subtly but crucially different from
297 setting to setting.

298 **Motivation**

299 Participants identified the dedication necessary to reach the highest levels of
300 coaching, and related this to the choices often made by role models. In the majority of cases,
301 role models were seen as being highly driven individuals, making big sacrifices to achieve.

302 For example, a hockey coach said "X's life revolves around coaching. She has even changed
303 jobs...quite literally gone down market, to give her more time for coaching and to do her
304 PhD." An athletics coach further emphasised this point by saying "even before it was his job,
305 X was completely committed to his athletes. Work was scheduled around their needs, on or
306 off the track."

307 Participants also highlighted their role models' commitment to improvement and
308 being as "good as they can be". For example, a judo coach suggested "X's commitment is
309 second to none. She is always working to improve herself, and is voracious in seeking out
310 new ideas to give her players the extra edge" while another judo coach commented "X is very
311 self-critical, but it seems to be realistically so. He takes the positive and learns from the
312 negative in any setting." Alongside this, a desire to work with and learn from other coaches
313 or specialists was highlighted as a key characteristic of role model coaches. An athletics
314 coach said "X has got some really good ideas on conditioning...some are from when
315 (athlete's name) worked with Y and he's taken what he thinks is useful." Another tennis
316 coach went further and suggested "when (athlete's name) worked with a psychologist, X was
317 always there, watching, listening and adding to her armoury."

318 **Ability to Plan**

319 Model coaches were seen as fervent goal setters, both in the long and short term. For
320 example, a rugby coach said "X is religious in his goal setting. He sets targets and reviews
321 his progress methodically against them. I think he even sets goals for his s****!" In
322 working towards their goals, they were also seen as experts at planning, although perhaps less
323 formally than some would like. Thus, early decision making about training and competition
324 plans, an adaptability (coupled with the network to facilitate late changes), and the ability to
325 change tack when necessary all emerged in sport-specific variants. Similarly, a weightlifting
326 coach said "he knows what he is doing and why he is doing it...he then fights tooth and claw

327 to get what he feels he needs." A hockey coach also alluded to this planning, saying "there is
328 always a Plan B...even C and D as well. When things go t*** up, X always seems to have
329 something up her sleeve."

330 Effective and goal-directed athlete selection was also seen as a feature of the planning
331 process of model coaches, although the nature and philosophy of this varied from sport to
332 sport. For example, an athletics coach stated "X can spot long term potential a mile off, and
333 he is extremely proactive to 'recruit' it. We all hate poaching but he does it very well" while
334 a rugby coach admitted "X would consider not only the player's skills but also what he
335 brought to the team...what role he could play, how he influenced the others." While there
336 were some negative connotations, they seem very much specific to the different sports. For
337 example, the poaching comment is from athletics and was not mentioned by the other sports.

338 **Phase Two**

339 The themes that emerged from the inductive content analysis on focus group data are
340 presented in Table 2. What follows is a brief and selective summary of the generally
341 expressed perceptions. Again, quotes are used to enable the reader to gain a better
342 appreciation of the context in which the themes emerge from the data.

343 **Communication**

344 As in phase one, effective communication was continuously cited as a key quality in
345 role model coaches with specific focus on "delivery" and "what" they do. In particular, the
346 ability to provide a clear message and be easily understood was reported as highly desirable
347 characteristic. For example, a golf coach said "I love the way X has got such a lovely easy
348 delivery, it's very relaxed...I think that is such a big thing, very easy to listen to." When
349 perceiving this capacity to "get their message across", participants appreciated the
350 chameleon-like quality of role models in their ability to utilise and switch between a variety
351 of methods and styles of communication. This was often discussed in relation to model

352 coaches being adept at catering for the diverse needs of participants. It was also reported that
353 this was often done in a way that instilled calm in athletes; as such, models were viewed as
354 being aware and in control of "softer" communication skills such as body language. A rugby
355 coach explained "I think of X, he'll tell you the same thing 5 times in 5 different ways, and
356 he's hitting everybody's needs." While a hockey coach suggested "X never seems to be
357 nervous, he's just able put across his point and then as a result the players can then feel calm
358 and look at what they are doing."

359 The data showed that role models were perceived as being forthright in their views
360 with both athletes and colleagues. Participants viewed their models' honesty in "saying what
361 they think" and making their expectations clear and upfront a key characteristic of an elite
362 coach. A rugby coach suggested "I mentioned and talked about X...that was one of his big
363 things, really clear on what he wanted in his club." Another rugby coach shared this view
364 when discussing a role model's honesty with players when it came to team selection:

365 The first thing X says to his players is you are not all gonna be treated the same
366 way. They might have earned their stripes, can play badly and will get picked
367 next week. You as a new player will play badly and you will be dropped, and
368 you'll have to fight your way back in.

369 Participants also made consistent reference to models' ability to admit to their mistakes and
370 limitations, not only with fellow coaching staff but also with the athletes themselves. A
371 hockey coach said:

372 One big thing with X was he was prepared to put his hands up and say "I've got it
373 wrong"...and he wouldn't just share it with staff, he'd actually sometimes share it with
374 his players and say "look we got this wrong, I've tried this or I've reacted wrongly to
375 this I'll speak to you all and we'll look at something different".

376 Equally, the ability to engage and inspire was a highly valued characteristic of role
377 model coaches. For example, a golf coach enthused "X was a great raconteur...he was just
378 fabulous as a storyteller. You are inspired with things that he says and you think 'I'm going
379 to use that myself'..." Another golf coach agreed with this view, saying "X is fascinating you
380 know...he's a very inspirational guy. When we went on that course with them...he had us
381 engaged for 2.5 hours...everyone came out of that room buzzing!"

382 The data also suggested that role models were very "egalitarian" in terms of their
383 attitude toward communication with others. Models welcomed input and opinion to the
384 coaching process from both athletes and colleagues. This was often framed in the context of
385 the model finding value in their methods being challenged and questions being asked of
386 "why" they did what they did. A rugby coach cited their experience:

387 I've worked with coaches who would have come in and just bawled you out of
388 the room...get on that pitch and do this that and the other...you'd have left that
389 training session thinking I couldn't wait to get away from there...whereas with
390 X it's all by agreement.

391 It was also consistently emphasised that models were willing to "share" knowledge and
392 information with other coaches. For example, a rugby coach recounted how "X would come
393 and he would sit there...bearing in mind they'd trained all day...he'd sit there all day and talk
394 and talk and talk and share that knowledge." Similarly, a golf coach observed how:

395 X almost had a constant forum with all of the guys who were teaching, so you
396 are kind of exchanging ideas...some coaches are isolated and haven't got people
397 to bounce stuff off and I think that is a bad thing.

398 **Relationships**

399 It was clear from the data that models were seen as experts at establishing and
400 maintaining effective relationships with their athletes, coaching staff, and others. In many

401 cases, this was outlined in the context of the model possessing the qualities participants
402 associated with a likeable and "nice" person, although this was often explained in a generic
403 way. For example, a rugby coach commented "X was one of the nicest guys you'd ever
404 meet...you wouldn't sort of sometimes associate him with having the dynamics of somebody
405 that could be a head coach...but, because he was a nice guy that worked in his favour." More
406 specifically, another rugby coach suggested "Whoever X runs into, he'll always spend a
407 minute talking to them...and he knows what you do. You feel like he cares about the wider
408 people involved in the game, and I think that's quite important."

409 A simple, but often stated characteristic was that of role models being "experts" at
410 managing individual athletes. This was emphasised with a particular focus on an ability to
411 cater for individuals' needs in order for athletes to reach their full potential. For example, a
412 hockey coach argued "I think it's knowing how to handle individuals. Some people need a
413 kick up the arse, some players need a cuddle...If you can do that then you can coach
414 anybody." While a squash coach suggested that "X is not about being the answer to
415 everything, but knowing the right direction to take that athlete...there is just a presumption
416 that this player deserves their own brand of delivery because they are an individual with their
417 own needs..."

418 Participants also consistently described model coaches as mentors for both athletes
419 and other coaches. This was often viewed in terms of the model being a source of wisdom or
420 advice for athletes as well as having an ability to challenge knowledge and enlighten more
421 novice or inexperienced colleagues as outlined by a squash coach:

422 You go 'oh I've got that now', and then X will just go "ah, but young one what
423 about this?" and you go 'oh ya bastard, I didn't know about that', and then you
424 know "... you understand this but do you understand that?" and you go 'ah!'

425 **Knowledge base**

426 The data highlighted knowledge in model coaches, both in terms of technical and
427 tactical knowledge, and the sheer depth of this knowledge, as a highly valued characteristic.
428 A hockey coach explained "the thing that attracted me to kind of be a disciple of X...was
429 because of his technical knowledge. It was that technical knowledge that I got attracted to as
430 a player." Another hockey coach stated:

431 The way X sets his team up they play to different systems...nobody could work out
432 how to beat his team...the way he just gets his teams to adapt to their style of play is
433 just something that the others can't do. They cannot figure him out.

434 Likewise, a golf coach said "I know he's not everybody's cup of tea, but X is a very talented
435 coach. He's got amazing knowledge of everything, body, the whole lot..." while another
436 golf coach agreed "the thing about X for me is, his information is fantastic, his knowledge is
437 fantastic...I think that is really important. You've got to have great knowledge." This view
438 was also shared by a squash coach who admitted "X didn't fill you with passion...he just had
439 a ridiculous amount of knowledge, and when I went to him, he kind of blew me away really."

440 **Motivation**

441 It was clear that participants viewed a passion for their sport and a general enthusiasm
442 for coaching as determinants of success in role model coaches. A rugby coach observed "you
443 can sense X's passion for the game...I think the players can quite easily suss out those that
444 are a bit more robotic. He's like a fan or supporter!" while a golf coach commented
445 "enthusiasm is a massive thing...all these coaches that we aspire to, they are all enthusiastic
446 about what they do...they are passionate about what they do, and as a result, they get better at
447 what they do." When highlighting that, in general, model coaches did not "do it for the
448 money", a squash coach also stated:

449 I think that's a key thing for X as well, do you genuinely in your bones just love the
450 idea of being a coach. If a big offer came along to be a banker or something else then
451 X wouldn't do it because he just wants to be a coach, it's what he likes.

452 The team sport participants (hockey and rugby league) in particular consistently
453 reported that model coaches possessed a clear vision and philosophy that they were
454 committed to working towards. Furthermore, role models were said to stick to this vision
455 ruthlessly, often incurring criticism from others (particularly "outsiders") as a result. A
456 hockey coach was typical in saying:

457 X gets criticism but has kind of stuck by his guns and said "well this is what I believe
458 in and therefore this is what my or our team believe"...it hasn't necessarily led to
459 success, but there's a very clear way of doing things.

460 This "dedication to the vision" was seen as a key quality and it was suggested that model
461 coaches are comfortable making "difficult" decisions in terms of playing and coaching staff
462 when it is in the interests of the long-term vision. This was outlined by a rugby coach who
463 said "when X took over he literally moved on the whole company. He kept the ones that he
464 knew could add quality...would buy into his philosophies and move things forward, but real
465 ruthless when it came to moving people on."

466 It was clear from the data that role models were seen as having served an
467 apprenticeship as a coach, working their way through the ranks. Despite this, models were
468 still perceived to be eager to improve and develop as a coach. As such, it was reported that
469 models voraciously identify gaps in their knowledge and areas where they can learn more. A
470 hockey coach argued that:

471 X must be sitting at home every night on the Internet...swotting away the whole time
472 because nobody "just knows it". Some of the stuff he's talking about...he'll say "I just

473 know it; it's just one of those things". And I think that's b*****s, he's got no kids
474 and he studies the game for fun!

475 In the case of golf in particular, it was also reported that models often sought out areas for
476 improvement by observing and learning from other coaches, as one coach noted "a lot of
477 them have travelled around and studied with the best coaches, X and people like him, they've
478 gone around and really tried to sample in their younger days so many different opinions."

479 The role of innovation and "trying new things" in coaching was consistently seen as a
480 particularly important feature of model coaches. Models were not seen to rest on their laurels
481 or become set in their ways; instead they were viewed as constantly trying to "push the
482 boundaries" in order to improve the performance of their athletes. Perhaps paradoxically,
483 this was often viewed as a comfort with making mistakes and accepting short to mid-term
484 performance decreases in favour of long term goals. A rugby coach said "I think that's being
485 prepared to lose...willing to take a chance, which some people don't do...X is prepared to
486 take a chance...he's prepared to adapt." A golf coach also felt strongly that "a great coach
487 has got to be an innovator...where are the improvements going to come from if we're all just
488 copying each other? The improvements come from the guy who is innovating...the crackpot
489 who is trying things."

490 **Delivers results**

491 Finally, the ability to demonstrate performance results was considered important.
492 This was evidenced both in terms of model coaches' and their athletes' track record of
493 winning tournaments and medals at the highest level. One squash coach observed "he's
494 almost brought a brand of coaching to the world...world numbers 1's and world champions,
495 and lots of world top 20 players, and there's not many done that." Model coaches' methods
496 were also perceived to achieve results, demonstrated primarily through their athletes'
497 continuous improvement in performance. A rugby coach also suggested "X didn't always

498 start off at high profile clubs, but one thing the guy did manage to do was he got 110% out of
499 every player he worked with. He made ordinary sides very competitive." These views were
500 also shared by golf coaches, with one stating:

501 X is very much of the opinion that the next shot has got to be better. He doesn't
502 believe it's like six months and then you might half start to see a little bit of light at
503 the end of the tunnel...within three balls he has everyone hitting it better.

504 **Discussion**

505 There were a variety of qualities reported by the coaches in the present study, notably
506 however, participants appeared to focus on the apparent broad brush/outward facing
507 behaviours and personality characteristics of their role model coach, as opposed to the ways
508 in which s/he actually worked. In short, coach perceptions in both phases were
509 predominantly associated with the "what is s/he like" or "what does s/he do" rather than the
510 "how does s/he do it" which we would suggest forms the basis of coaching skill (cf. Abraham
511 & Collins, 1998). This finding is perhaps not surprising, and matches the "great man" (no
512 misogyny intended) approaches that typified early work in leadership development
513 (Chelladurai & Carron, 1978; Gill, 2007). Of course, this finding probably holds both
514 positive and negative implications for the coaches' behaviour and performance. It is
515 however, and to say the least, a little one-sided in ignoring the processes of effective
516 coaching whilst emphasising (we would suggest, disproportionately) the outward facing,
517 image aspects. Consequently, it seems the results contradict earlier research (e.g., Abraham,
518 Collins, & Martindale, 2006; Jones et al., 2003), which has evidenced apparent higher-level
519 coach support for the more crucial importance of design, structure and impact of the coaching
520 environment; in short, the modus operandi of "how" the coach works. Consider the
521 perceptions of the coaches in the present study, for example, against the support apparent for
522 design, structure, and environment from a smaller but more elite group of coaches in

523 Abraham et al.'s (2006) validation of a coaching schematic. We agree that there are
524 contradictions but see this as a key finding of the current study; in short, what the samples of
525 mid-level coaches consistently *didn't* use as part of their "value schematic" is perhaps as
526 important as what they did.

527 The point here (and once again, note our caveat on the need for further research) is
528 that the "body of the kirk" (i.e., the "average" coach) does not seem to acknowledge, or
529 perhaps recognise what theory, and *some* of those at the top, think are the most effective and
530 desirable components and characteristics that make coaches successful. For example, no
531 coach in the current study referred to qualities representative of their model's decision-
532 making processes (Cushion et al., 2003; Nash & Collins, 2006) or the problem solving
533 procedures employed during the dynamic and complex process of coaching (Abraham &
534 Collins, 2011a; Lyle, 1999). Similarly, there were few references to the pedagogy of the
535 coaching process (i.e., methods of meaningful teaching and learning) or links made with the
536 principles of skill acquisition (Abraham & Collins, 2011b; Cushion et al., 2012). Whatever
537 the reasons for this, poor coach education, poor CPD or just entrenched views, it appears that
538 demonstrably effective methods are overlooked, not encouraged, or not seen as relevant by
539 the majority in this sample of sub-elite coaches. Significantly, social theory and previous
540 research suggests that people are more likely to emulate the behaviour of those they
541 themselves choose to value (e.g., role models) rather than people (e.g., coach educators)
542 nominated for them (Christakis & Fowler, 2007). As a consequence, the informal
543 communications, which have generated the impressions reported in the present study, seem to
544 focus on personal characteristics rather than the craft of coaching. Or to put it another way,
545 are coaches "learning" how to be liked as opposed to how to be effective?

546 As a result, not only are the coaches in the present study perhaps limited in their
547 ability to self-develop, or be developed, towards higher status/efficacy, but it may also be that

548 any ambitious and upwardly mobile coach must "pass through unscathed" a social context
549 which is, in some respects, not conducive to the ways in which s/he should develop.
550 Specifically, many coaches seem to appoint and value their coaching role models on
551 personality rather than technique. There are interesting similarities here with other
552 professions that involve a "semi-permeable" barrier to intellectual development; the "canteen
553 culture" within the police force is one such example (Onifade, 2002). Of course, the extent to
554 which this split will also inhibit the effective progression of performers is another important
555 consideration; an efficient and seamless performance pathway is hardly facilitated by
556 attitudinal and behavioural bifurcation! The need for further investigation as well as
557 educational and developmental initiatives to address this should be obvious; as we highlight
558 here and elsewhere, the degree of challenge imposed by the degree of difference is likely to
559 vary sport by sport.

560 On a more positive note, there are "perceived expert features" highlighted here which
561 could be exploited as ripe for development now. If the majority see these competencies as
562 desirable characteristics of top coaches, there will be a healthy "social fillip" to initiatives
563 that address them. The ways in which some of these areas are best developed is worthy of
564 consideration. For example, content ideas are extremely useful, especially so when they
565 employ "analogy learning" (cf. Poolton, Masters, & Maxwell, 2006). Ongoing evolution of
566 such approaches, coupled of course with the requirement to present and consider
567 underpinning theoretical justification, would seem to be a good way to generate the levels of
568 professional deliberation (Evetts, 2002) and exchange that, we suggest, typify high
569 performing environments in many other professions (e.g., Finance, Shanteau, 1995;
570 Medicine, Patel & Ramoni, 1997; Nursing, Husted & Husted, 2008).

571 These ideas notwithstanding, sport differences in levels of interaction and perception
572 remain the crucial considerations in the effective design and deployment of coach

573 development. Clearly, providers must take time to embed themselves within the culture
574 before deciding on the best ways in which to develop coaches (Butcher & Clarke, 2008).
575 Additionally, however, genuine development should also look to remediate those
576 environments that are not characterised by sharing and mutual reflection (Culver & Trudel,
577 2006). Whatever the limitation of the critical reflection process, there seems little doubt that
578 "having access to knowledgeable and respected coaching peers is critical to the reflective
579 process" (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001, p. 32). The fact that levels (or more probably usage) of
580 access varies so much from social setting to social setting makes this an important factor for
581 attention. These differences are reflected in so many constructs (for example, the crime of
582 poaching specific to athletics) that the need for embedded and socially aware interventions,
583 combined with subtle but explicit culture change is obvious. Add to this, the suggestion that
584 there are some coaches whose "won't learn, won't change" attitude seems deeply entrenched
585 (cf. Collins et al., 2012) and the complexity of the challenge is further clarified.

586 The findings of the present study suggest that the social milieu in which the
587 interviewed developing coaches are embedded, which has been described as quite an
588 effective force for change (Stoszowski & Collins, 2014), may not be so effective for
589 advancing coaching technique as opposed to character. As such, if the main source of
590 encouragement for these coaches to improve was his or her peers, they might not necessarily
591 receive very coherent, accurate or effective guidance. In fact, if the social milieu which a
592 coach is embedded in is *not* conducive to effective and appropriate development, it seems
593 reasonable to assume that it could be at least as likely to promote the spread of negative or
594 less than optimal behaviours (Christakis & Fowler, 2007). The bottom line is that, limitations
595 in this investigation notwithstanding, there are some clear global attitudinal changes that need
596 to be engendered if coach development initiatives utilising social learning based methods are

597 to realise optimal change. Longitudinal data against a systematic socially based intervention
598 is needed to check these assertions and such study is currently underway.

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Table 1

Results of Phase One Inductive Content Analysis

| Higher Order Theme | Lower Order Theme | 743 |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-----|
| Knowledge and experience | Knowledge base | 744 |
| | Experience as a performer | 745 |
| Communication | Clarity of expectation | 746 |
| | Clear instructions and information | 747 |
| | Portrays confidence | 748 |
| Motivation | Drive and sacrifice | 749 |
| | Commitment to improvement | 750 |
| | Desire to learn from others | 751 |
| Ability to plan | Goal setting | 752 |
| | Training/competition planning | 753 |
| | Athlete selection | 754 |
| | | 755 |

Table 2

Results of Phase Two Inductive Content Analysis

| Higher Order Theme | Lower Order Theme | 756 |
|--------------------|--|-----|
| Communication | Messages are clear and intelligible | 757 |
| | Forthright with opinions and expectations | 758 |
| | Engages and inspires | 759 |
| | Egalitarian attitude | |
| Relationships | Likeable person | |
| | Attentive to the needs of individuals | |
| | Acts as a mentor | |
| Knowledge base | Technical and tactical knowledge | |
| | Depth and amount of knowledge | |
| Motivation | Passionate about coaching/being a coach | |
| | Committed to pursuing a clear vision | |
| | Eager to identify gaps/areas for improvement | |
| | Thirst for innovation | |
| Delivers results | Has won medals/championships | |
| | Their athletes continuously improve | |