

Module 1. Athletic environment

Unit 1.1 Characteristics of coaches: competencies and skills

Introduction

Throughout the next unit, we will outline the skill set that a coach should have, both for team sports and for individual sports regardless of the sports specialty.

In recent years, sport has found a place in the market world, which has meant that sports are seen not only as a space for training athletes, but also as a consumer good. The interest in sport revolves around winning a championship, and also positioning an athlete to convert them into consumer product.

Faced with this reality coaches must commit themselves to training athletes in terms of their capabilities and achieving their maximum performance possible. They must also manage relationships between the group, the managers, the press, etc. Coaches should adopt a leader profile who, in addition to training the athletes, coaches and educates them facilitating them with all the tools required to survive in the world surrounding sport. Along with managers, they establish the objectives to achieve throughout the year adapting these objectives to the interests of the athletes and not the market. They must keep in mind that the athletes are the ultimate protagonists and that they must work for their benefit.

One of the points that should be addressed by the coach is the order of priorities: achieve cohesion in the team by positioning themselves as the primary leader, to ensure that relationships between team members are stable and that they all share the same objectives in relation to what should be achieved as a team.

Today all coaches should also focus on their training in the sports psychology field, which goes beyond their knowledge related to the particular sport. Coaches who only master the motor aspect of their role will fail to understand many of the problems affecting their athletes' performance.

Sports psychology has faced a lot of resistance in the field of sports and poor performance results were attributed to failures in physical variables (in terms of amount of training,



poor execution). Coaches who complement their knowledge with training from the field of psychology will be more well-rounded to accompany the athletes they train.

Whether or not coaches should train in academic fields beyond the strictly sports world is not subject to debate. If they do not integrate the sciences dedicated to human behavior, they will not be able to effectively manage relationships in the sports world. In addition to all the technical and tactical learning, it is very important for coaches to acquire knowledge in the field of sports psychology allowing them to therefore manage the sports group more comprehensively.

In their daily interactions, coaches need to take care of the relationship established with athletes, paying attention to individual characteristics and treating them respectfully and pleasantly. This will have a positive effect on the athlete's performance, influence his confidence and involvement regarding athletic objectives.

In the case of team sports, in addition to the above, there is a collective variable. That is, in addition to the relationship between the coach and each of the athletes, the relationship between the athletes as well as the coach's relationship with the group should be taken into consideration. In this way, the effects will be reflected in individual and team performance, as well as in team cohesion, which is an extremely important issue, influenced by the perception of equality in treatment, trust or involvement.

1.1.1 Coaches and their qualities

The coach as a sports project

It is important for a sports coach to find a way of making his day-to-day practice a philosophy of action that characterizes his way of acting and managing a project. The project determines the conceptual structure underpinning the sports institution in terms of: values; behavioral norms; game styles; short-, medium- and long-term objectives, etc. As soon as coaches are hired by a sports institution, it is necessary to decide whether they will be responsible for creating a project for the institution, or if they will merely execute and adapt to a project already in place. In both cases, coaches must possess a number of competencies:

- **Communicating values and behavioral norms:** coaches educate athletes so they are able to manage their sports careers and are responsible enough to face each training session and competition according to the group's objectives.
- **Creating a playing philosophy that characterizes the team:** based on the knowledge and experience coaches possess, they must create their own playing models for the team. These models must be adapted to players' characteristics and match their potential.

- **Finding player profiles according to their model:** based on the coach's criteria and the institution's needs, coaches must find player profiles that fit the project.
- **Creating sports objectives:** together with the club's leadership, coaches must plan objectives to achieve in the short, medium and long term. These objectives must adapt the reality of athletes and the club to evolve in line with the institutional reality.

The coach as a specialist trainer

The coach is part of a complex process, which is responsible for the management and training of a group of subjects with their own particularities and needs that must be addressed based on the team's objectives and those of the institution. Therefore the coach must be adequately trained and experienced to fulfill the role of guide and facilitator throughout the athletic process. To this end, certain characteristics are required, such as:

- Mastery and in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of the particular sport in question.
- Form a group of players according to the established objectives and based on the system that needs to be implemented.
- Manage and direct trainings and competitions.
- Undergo continual professional development.

The coach as an educator of human resources

As part of the sports institution, coaches are faced with the reality of a group of subjects with whom they must learn to get along. Thus, relationship management is indispensable. Directors, members of the coaching staff, players, club staff, family members, fans, etc. all make up a group of subjects who have different interests and needs and with whom they must learn to get along. Coaches are responsible for maintaining harmonious relationships within the group of individuals who are involved in the sports project. This task can be summarized in three points:

- Ensure that the interpersonal relationships are optimal between the different team members, both athletes and the professionals who are part of it.
- Maintain good relations between the trainer and player. E.g.: identify and further develop the motivations, needs and objectives of each and every one of their players.
- Providing information on the progress and difficulties of projects managed, on news, challenges faced, etc. to keep the groups that compose the institution informed.
- Making decision based on the results and dealing with the athletic situation – whether it is positive or negative.

The coach in charge of public relations

The coach is responsible for sharing or disseminating the sports project with club members, society, the media, etc. With regards to this, it is important not to lose sight of the project for and with the team because public relations are often distracting when the team achieves the expected sports results. The coach's attitude towards the media and the general public must remain unchanged, whatever the results. His attitude and manner when relating to the public will be reflected in his leadership and in the team's performance. To this end the coach must:

- Ensure emotional stability: find solutions and resolve conflicts.
- When faced with other people's mistakes, confront the situation and apologize on behalf of the institution or the group.
- Assume responsibilities and face future challenges with greater strength.

As can be seen, the characteristics required of a coach are varied and complex. Their role involves guiding the team's project towards achieving positive results, training athletes based on their demands and managing relationships.

1.1.2 Profile of high-performance coaches

Many investigations have outlined concepts regarding the profile required by a high performance coach. Some of the characteristics based on project management and relationship management were described previously. Now we will review the contributions of some authors regarding the subject matter.

Mandeville and Riveras (1989) state that a coach must have the ability to diagnose in a timely manner any type of situation within the sports institution or the team he is responsible for. This will enable him to master the communication style with regards to the decisions that are made and his ability to provide alternative solutions.

On the other hand, Salmela (1995) suggests that not only must the coach master the issues related to technical, tactical and physical skills, but he must also be at the forefront of sports psychology knowledge and contributions. To this end, Salmela suggests that the coach should adopt active training, continual professional development and adapt to new educational trends.

Cronan-Hillix and Davidson (1986) establish a list of characteristics for coaches:

- Permanent commitment and interest in his work.
- Personality including good sense of humor, empathy and honesty.
- Mastery of communication skills.
- Collaborative spirit, openness and willingness.



- Interest in investigating and furthering his sport-related knowledge.
- Positive and enthusiastic attitude.
- Predisposition for order and organization.
- Stimulating role.
- Ability to teach and learn from other colleagues.
- Observe foreign teaching styles.
- Flexibility in his projects and positive attitude when facing new challenges.

The effectiveness of a coach is not only manifested by achieving positive results, but also through the ability to react to the demands of the team.

The leader is capable of being successful regardless of the situation. For coaches to lead their teams they must meet the conditions mentioned throughout this unit: intelligence, independence, self-confidence, firmness, creativity are valued traits for this leadership style.

Sternberg and Ruzgis (1994) suggest that creativity is an indispensable trait for all sports leaders and coaches. The personality traits of creative coaches should include the following characteristics:

- **Tolerance for ambiguity:** the ability to keep moving ahead when one's creative proposals do not come to fruition.
- **Tolerance for overcoming obstacles:** the more one seeks to innovate, the more obstacles appear. Coaches must be aware of this process.
- **Active growth:** creative tendencies are primarily innovative, which makes continual professional development a necessity.
- **Knowing how to take risks:** breaking the structures that would stabilize a project and daring to take on new challenges.
- **Motivation, bravery and courage:** these are traits of individuals that believe in themselves, enjoy their work, and are capable of instilling it in others.

This applies to all areas in which a coach is involved: game models, relationship style, way of managing a project, etc. Creativity is required and must be trained by the coach.

Coaches as Leaders and Experts

Experts are those who develop the capacity for knowledge and possess a set of talents gained through experience. In addition to this, they have a great capacity to resolve issues, be efficient and provide favorable results while being oriented towards the established objectives. Gilar and Castejón (2003) establish a balanced ratio: the better the results, abilities and experience accumulated, the more chances there are of being called an expert.

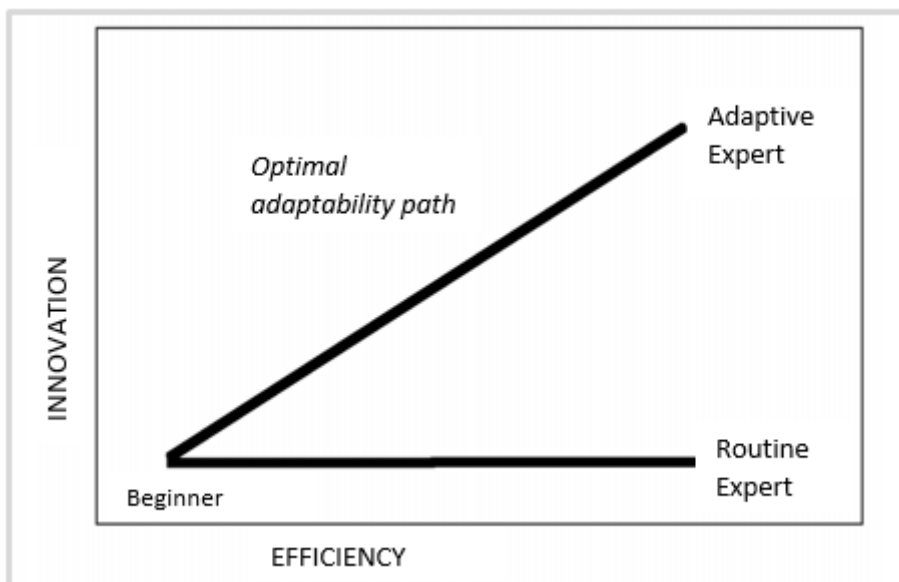
Hatano and Ouro (2003) posit that expertise is a result of acquiring specific knowledge, cognitive abilities and skills oriented at mastering efficient and effective performance. Kimball and Holyoak (2000) differentiate between two types of experts: routine and adaptive.

Routine experts are able to solve problems quickly and accurately, but have only limited capabilities to deal with new types of problems. Adaptive experts, on the other hand, may be able to create new procedures derived from their expert knowledge (Holyoak, 1991, p. 310).

In this sense, and to highlight the difference between those two expert styles, Chi (2006) highlights the following:

- **Routine experts:** apply their knowledge to their day-to-day problems, and make successful interventions based on normal situations. They are effective but do not innovate.
- **Adaptive experts:** use day-to-day problems as learning opportunities in order to understand the dynamics of each situation. They manage to modify the procedures to be carried out in a flexible way and without losing sight of the objective. They are effective innovators.

Figure 1: Routine and Adaptive Experts



Source: Saiz, Cavo in Schwatz (2005).

The characteristics of athletic training and its high degree of variability, mean that the coach must be able to adapt and master these scenarios. Each training session involves novelty characteristics, not only related to the proposals that may be made by the coach, but also related to players' interventions, who are dynamic and do not always act the same way. Therefore the expert has to be flexible in terms of changes arising in training

situations or during competition. Each expert has their own particularities that make him unique, and it is difficult to list all the characteristics that a subject should have in order to face situations, since each situation is unique, and therefore how they are dealt with is also.

Although each problem is unique, interventions by experts are not random and require planning. The adaptability they demonstrate is a result of their experience, intuition and knowledge of the situations.

Expert coaches assert that their intervention models must adapt to the characteristics of the institutions, to the players (age, sex, experience, motivation) and to the family members who have a direct influence over the athlete. These models evolve constantly, just like the group itself. Furthermore, they adapt and change in sports competitions, according to the objectives, the opponent, the context, the level of the championship, the number of players injured to face a certain match, etc.

Therefore, adaptability is a characteristic required of every expert coach. High athletic performance also demands a mastery of this ability to adapt.

Differences in the training practice allow for the individuality of each coach, the preferences of those training and the demands of various organizational adjustments. A training philosophy is a comprehensive statement regarding the beliefs and behaviors that will characterize the coach's methods and style (Lyle, 1999, p. 30).

Training is characterized by having ever-changing dynamics, resulting from interactions between the members of the team and an institution. Therefore, the training models used should not be rigid, predetermined structures nor tied to theoretical models. The adaptability of the expert must contemplate this dynamic and integrate his experience, the context and the effective application of the model.

1.1.3 Motivational climate

Coaches must generate learning opportunities for athletes, which go beyond mere athletic training, so that they can make use of the training process in their extra-sports life. This is one of the coach's responsibilities as an educator of developing subjects.

Duda and Balaguer (2007) argue that athletic environments (managers, family members, coaches, etc.) are part of the subjects' lives during their development stage and that these actors intervene as socializing agents.

The objective is to ensure young people have an enjoyable experience and that they are able to transfer this experience to their daily life. If this happens, the chances of subjects achieving high performance increase; or in any case, they become physically active persons after their sports career. It comes down to sowing interest in a practice that is useful for a person's development.

As coaches master psychological resources, they increase the chances of their athletes having positive experiences.

The athlete's motivation is directly related to a coach's leadership style. A coach's teaching profile will determine whether or not a subject's interest is piqued. Two models are noted for having positive implications on athletes' interest and motivation.

Smoll and Smith's mediational model (1989) posits that coaches and their behavior affect both athletes' performance as well as their own. Coaches act in relation to the subject's behavior.

Chelladurai's multidimensional model (1993) posits that there should be a coherence between a coach's behavior, the behavior athletes expect from a coach and the behavior a coach displays when faced with a demand.

Based on the motivational climate, it is possible to identify a relationship with the athlete's interpretation of success or failure. In the words of Nicholls (1989), the perception of success or failure depends on three factors:

- The athlete's interpretation in terms of their skill levels, either high or low.
- The subjective interpretation of success or failure based on the conception of adopted skill.
- The conception of ability is subject to situational and evolutionary changes.

Ames (1992) was one of the first to use the term **motivational climate** in reference to the environments created by the subjects that are significant for the athlete (parents, coaches). Situational factors are part of the motivational climate, i.e., home, training camp, school, etc. These are the places where subjects associate with others and create concepts of success or failure based on the situations they experience.

This is why the coach must master the concepts outlined, because if he does not know how the environment influences the motivation of the athletes, he may demotivate the subjects and, therefore, reduce their performance. The motivational climate can be summarized with the following characteristics:

- The way in which training contents are approached.
- How rewards are used.

- The way in which the coach as leader assesses the athletes' results.

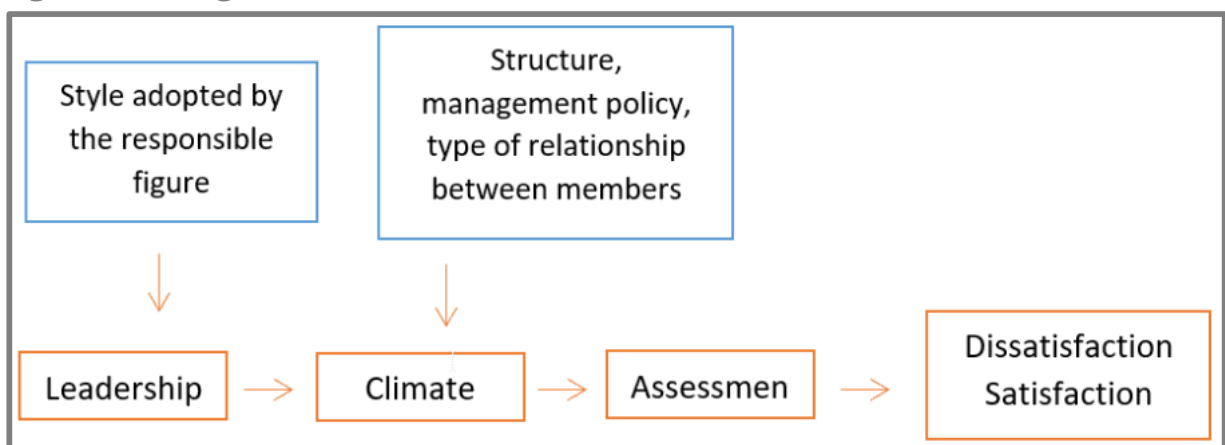
As coaches master the theoretical and practical resources learned during their career, they can turn their experience into permanent learning and become experts in the subject matter. Under these conditions, they will be able to undertake any type of work proposal and adapt it to the characteristics of the athletes with whom they are working at that time. Their ability to adapt will be related to how they make use of their experience and knowledge. They will also have the opportunity to permanently innovate based on the challenges arising from practicing sports.

The organizational climate

The organizational climate refers to the objective perception that the members of an organization have with regards to how it functions. It refers to the permanent characteristics influencing and determining the personality traits of the members.

In all types of organizations, the organizational climate is determined by the relationships between its members. And among these relationships, the type of bond the leader establishes with the team. The leader may be the coach or someone from management. In most cases the leading, or most visible, figure is that of the sports coach, so his leadership style will set the course of the organizational climate. If there is a good level of communication, respect for others, and feelings of belonging to the institution, then the climate will be that of a positive and productive environment.

Figure 2: The organizational climate



Source: Prepared by the author.

As can be observed in the figure, the climate of an organization is determined and influenced by the chosen leadership style.

Productivity in an organization is not only related to the effectiveness of its members or the team's performance. There are numerous examples of squads with high-ranking

players who do not achieve the corresponding performance levels. In this case, the lack of direction by the leader is obvious, and it harms and jeopardizes the organization.

There is a linear relationship between effective leadership and positive results in the organization. Environments that are characterized by productivity have effective leadership. Productivity and favorable results are easier to achieve when these conditions are achieved.

In the case of high performance, agents outside the institution (such as the press, sponsors, fans, etc.) when results are not positive, exert pressure on the team and prove difficult to control. In this case, the organization may have good leaders, but the external influence negatively affects the climate, and when on top of this the results are poor, it can lead to the resignation of some of its members.

An organization may have a good leadership style and may have established a good climate within the institution, however many times results do not reflect these processes; they are thus understood within the institution as part of a process within a long-term project. This ends up generating external pressure leading to decision-making which does not favor the team or the organization. Thus, it is evident that the leader must assume the responsibility of guiding the organization at said stage and contribute to his project, despite external pressure, so as not to lose what has already been achieved at the institutional level.

A leader's management is everything. Hence their training and experience must be continual and should never slow down. Faced with times of crises and poor results, a coach must continue to work and demonstrate that crises are part of the process and that projects must be adhered to. In this case, the leader generates the best possible organizational climate and the members of the institution support his proposal. In this particular situation, where there is good leadership, a good project but bad results, the situation within the institution should be evaluated by its members and they should not be influenced by external agents.

It is worth mentioning the influence that culture exerts within any organization and, therefore, the influence it can have on the leadership style and institutional climate. At the macro-level, every institution is part of a society or customary system that influences the behavior of its members. The more the leader of a project understands change dynamics and social behaviors, the more he will be able to effectively develop and manage his work. The dynamic and complex nature of society is transferred to the people that make it up, and this in turn, to the groups that make up institutions.

To summarize the above, in each sports institution there will be different organizational climates, depending on the leadership style within that particular organization and how



it is perceived by its members. The leader is responsible for generating proactive work environments in which team members develop their potential. Each member of the institution should work in harmony and synergy towards that purpose, without neglecting the project managed by the leader. The project leader should keep institution members informed about the objectives to be achieved so he can develop his role without neglecting the determined course to be taken.

Athletes can optimize their performance when they do not have to worry about matters beyond their training. Coaches improve their effectiveness inasmuch as their management is effective, together with the training methods they use and their continual and uninterrupted professional development. Once the project leader is defined (the coach, in most cases), management must create a context in which the proposals are achieved harmoniously and each role is managed to achieve the objectives. Clarity about the expectations, regarding what each member must do, helps establish a good organizational climate.

Given the size of some sports clubs, with multiple and varied disciplines, the organizational climate will be managed by each coach in his area and overseen by the club president. In these types of institutions, the management of and clarity in the distribution of roles is important, especially when spaces are shared by more than one athletic discipline. It is common to find work environments where it is not clear who is responsible for certain areas, and this eventually generates a poor institutional climate and leads to deviations from achieving the established objectives.

The emotional engagement between members who share a common project is important and it has a direct relationship with sporting success.

1.1.4 Team cohesion

Success in sport goes beyond the sum of individualities. In this case the term "team cohesion" is used to refer to the fact that members of a work group should not only have the ability to work together but there should also be a certain emotional engagement between them.

Workgroups made up of people who maintain a good mutual relationship have more chances of succeeding than other teams where this is not the case.

According to Carron (1982) it is: "A dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives" (p.124).

Understanding group dynamics is fundamental to achieving team cohesion.

We will now outline the differences between task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion refers to the degree to which the members of a team work together to achieve an identifiable objective. Social cohesion refers to a positive relationship between team members.

Team cohesion factors (Carron, 1982):

- Personal factors: satisfaction and similar experiences.
- Team factors: previous success, good communication, team objectives and the ability to achieve the proposed objectives.
- Leadership factors: effort to develop cohesion.
- Environmental factors: group dimension.

These variables can help manage a sports projects and lead groups so that cohesiveness and the institutional climate are favorable to improving the performance of the institution and the team.

Unit 1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Coaches as leaders and experts

In this unit, we will review some studies that demonstrate the link between a coach not fulfilling his role optimally and sports abandonment.

In sports institutions that have a psychologist or a group of psychologists, in most cases, these are subject to the demands of the coaches. In 70% of cases, coaches are the ones who identify the need for psychological interventions and they designate the cases.

Sports psychologists must interpret the corresponding role of the coach and the influence he exerts on the performance of athletes, in order to ensure the coach's interventions are only contributing to the achievement of favorable results. As mentioned previously, in many cases the role of each is not clear and this negatively affects how the institution operates and how athletes are formed and trained.

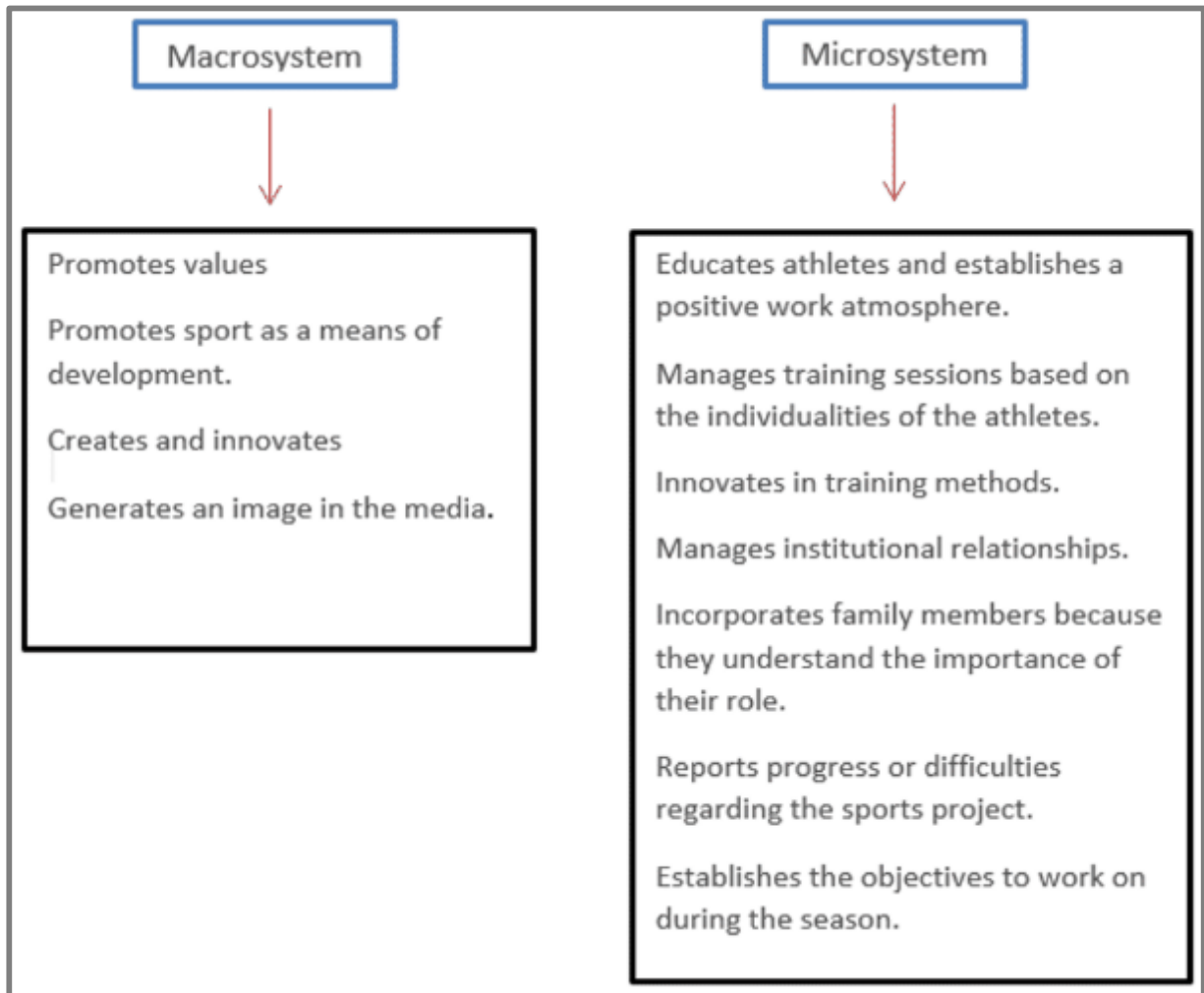
A study by Feltz (1992) showed that 80% of children who start a sport activity, later abandon it for reasons related to their relationship with their coach. These reasons include: the amount of and abuse in the distribution of workload, the lack of positive stimulation, prejudices and the perception of competition.

In other research, López Abascal and García Ucha (1994) conducted a study with 257 swimmers and demonstrated that 4 out of 10 males and 3 out of 10 females, abandoned training for reasons related to the coaches. The same authors conducted a questionnaire with 168 swimmers in which 3 variables were measured: cognitive ability, emotional stability and behavior. The results obtained in this questionnaire demonstrated that the most valued coaches worked positively across the three variables, obtained better results in competitions and lower dropout rates. The opposite was found in coaches who were given negative values for these variables.

Despite these studies, high performance and sport exist thanks to coaches. We aim in this case to provide training to help coaches incorporate appropriate strategies to manage athletes. In addition to this, it is important for sports psychologists to know that coaches are responsible for leading training processes, and therefore they should accompany this process.

Coaches and athletes are the protagonists of sports training processes. The following image summarizes the importance of the coach in institutions and in the society in which he is immersed.

Figure 3: The coach's role



Source: Prepared by the author.

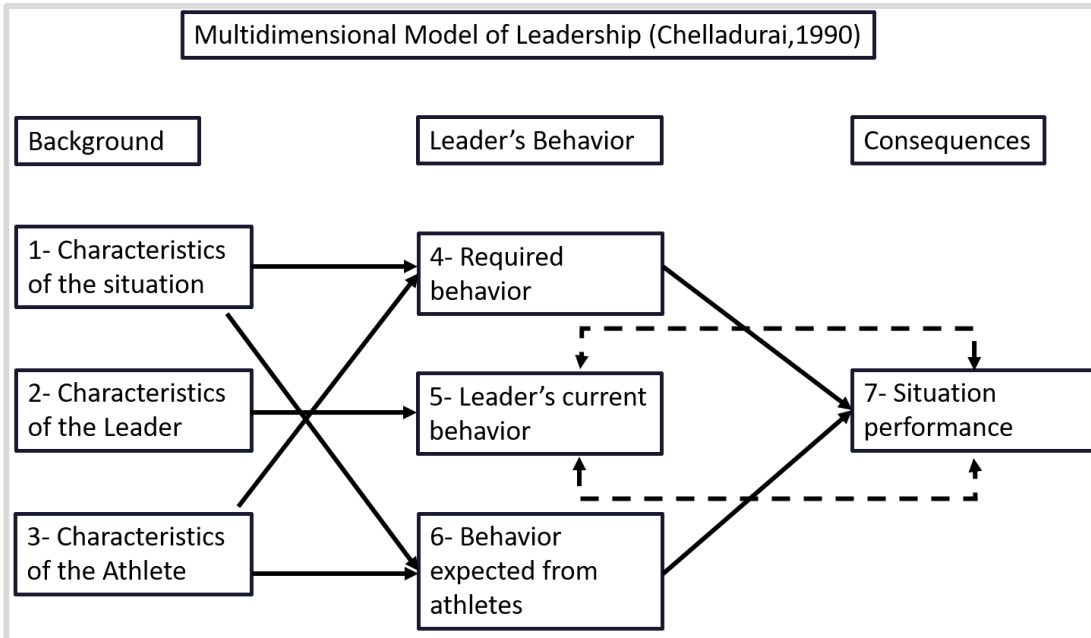
Noce (2003) conducted a study based on the personality traits of coaches, their communication style and their leadership skills. As well as proposing a series of characteristics for an ideal model coach:

- Able to motivate.
- Be an example to follow in terms of behavior.
- Sets objectives adapted to the institutional and athletic reality.
- Identifies individual differences between the athletes and adapts the training methodology proposals.
- Listens and leads by example.

Chelladurai (1990) proposes a multidimensional model regarding the role of a sports leader. The model develops personality characteristics and group components, as well as the way these interact in the environment.

This model holds that the characteristics of the leader will adapt to the demands of the situation and context, to the reality of the athletes and to the institutional and team objectives. Hence it is defined as a multidimensional model.

Figure 4: Multidimensional leader



Source: Chelladurai, 1990.

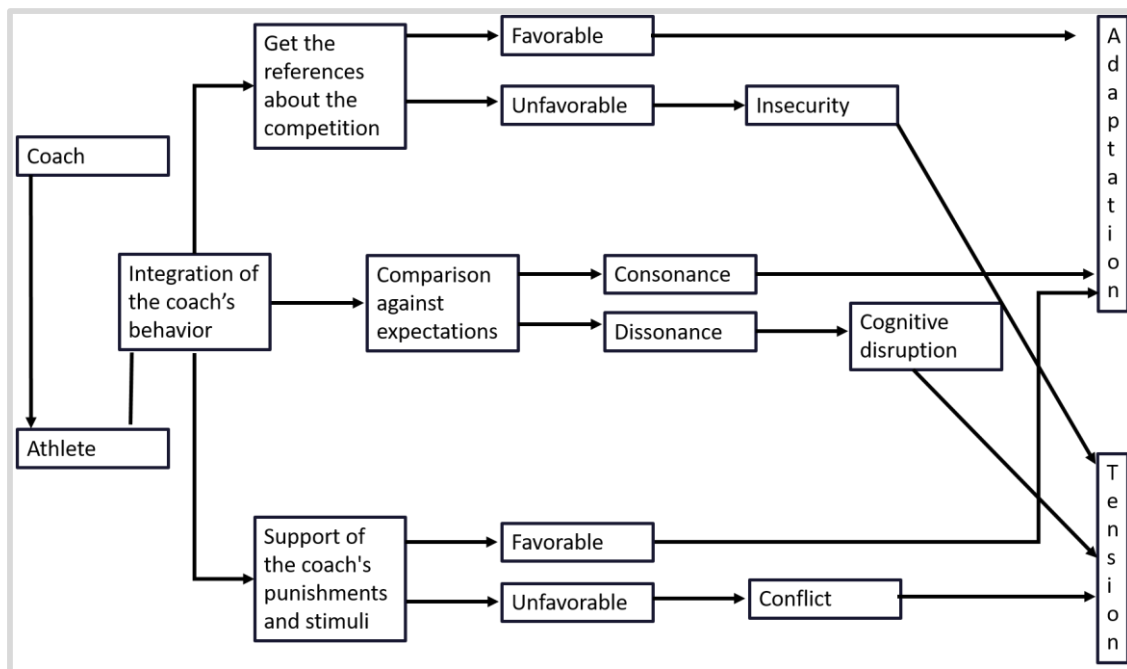
1.2.2 Relationship between the coach and athlete

Having clarified the role a coach should adopt to work effectively, we will identify the problems that frequently arise in the relationship between the coach and athlete.

One of the biggest problems that appears in this coach-athlete relationship is related to communication style, which is expressed through the subject's negative emotional states. The most frequent issues mentioned by athletes are:

- Lack of understanding towards athletes due to individual characteristics. Tendency to demand the same from all athletes.
- Favoritism with some athletes.
- Prejudices based on social stereotypes.
- Lack of ability to provide emotional support.
- Inability to interpret potential conflicts.
- Inability to interpret the use of their own body language and recognize the influence it has on athletes (inappropriate gestures, signs, etc.).
- Lack of adaptability to new trends in training methodology.

Figure 5: Coach's behavior and its consequences



Source: Brandao & Valdés, 2005.

In the case of sports institutions, many show flaws when selecting coach profiles to work in some areas. Most do so based on the sports history of a coach, on friendships or recommendations, but very seldom choose a coach based on his professional development or ethics. This is not the case in all institutions, but should be taken into account during the selection process.

If there is a sports psychologist on the team, they can help with the selection process, especially in institutions that do not have a human resources department for this purpose.

Role of the sports psychologist in the training process

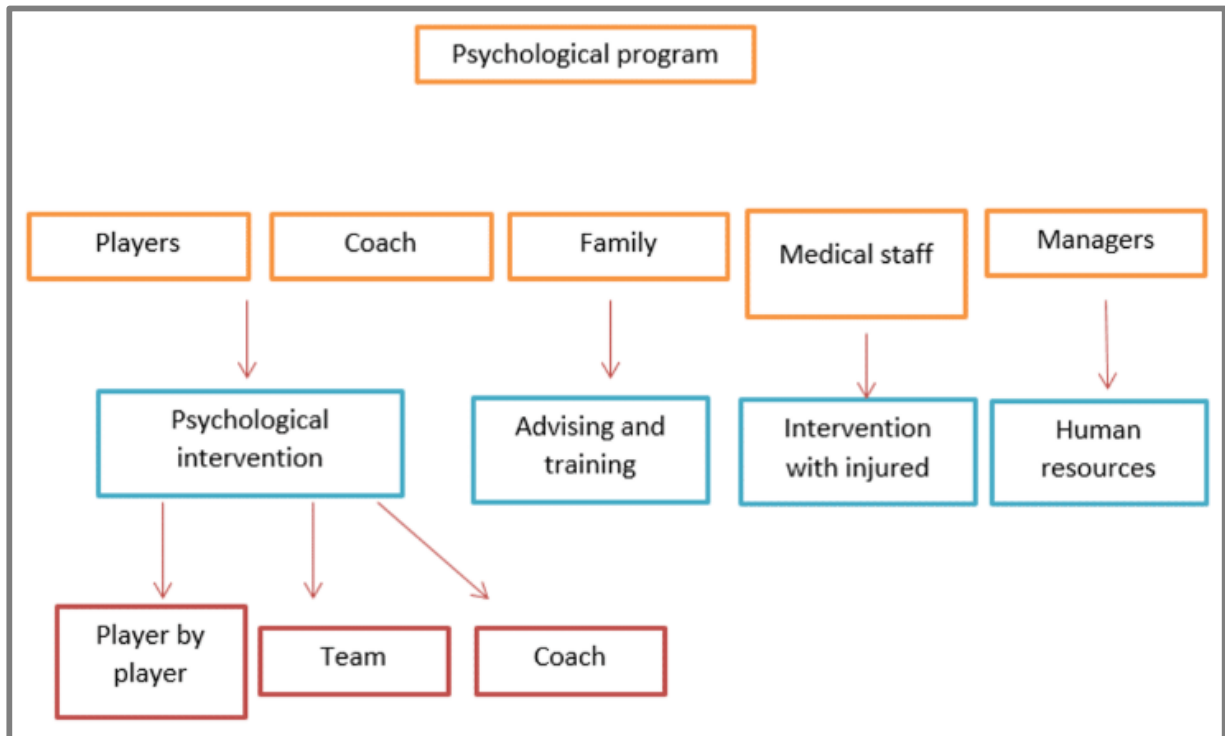
A study conducted by the psychology department at a Spanish soccer club, clearly defined the specific role of that department, as well as the way sports psychology projects are managed. It is important to highlight the work done in this study in order to provide guidelines for potential sports psychologists when dealing with intervention programs.

Psychology departments are teams made up of a group of psychologists specialized in sports. Their interventions aim to provide answers to behavioral, emotional and cognitive issues, in athletes as well as coaches or managers. The interventions follow: evaluation, advice, training and guidance.

In the organizational chart for work, interventions are carried out as outlined below.



Figure 6: Work program



Source: Prepared by the author.

Work Philosophy

We will start by establishing a set of basic principles from which the intervention model will be implemented and which will be applied to the entire institutional structure. The model is adapted to the needs based on: the individual differences of each member, specific situations (training or competencies), and demands (training or performance).

Based on this, the established principles include:

- **The player is the protagonist:** in this case the need arises to work based on the particular demands of each player separately. The psychological variables of each player are different based on the different circumstances they have been through. Therefore, everybody handles their anxiety levels, motivation, self-confidence, etc. in a different way.
- **Potential of the player:** individually, each of the players has a quality that can be strengthened. Regardless of their current behavior and ability, you have to believe in the players and long-term projects for their training and formation. The player is the protagonist and everybody else is a collaborator accompanying their training and formation process.
- **The player as a person:** the approach is inclusive, the player is a whole in which athlete and subject are the same person as are their realities and experiences, both within and beyond the sports institution. There is often confusion about how to treat

an athlete with regards to the training intensity level and the fact that they are only children (in the case of youth soccer teams) is thus overlooked.

- **Thinking player:** during his sports career, a player must make decisions, interpret contexts and respond to different situations. For this reason the aim is to train subjects capable of successfully facing the different situations encountered in life and sport.
- **Integral player:** the athlete is considered a functional unit (social, emotional, physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioral) and should be considered from this complex perspective in the training proposals and psychological interventions.
- **The coach as a leader:** in this case the coach must overcome the athletic obstacles to reach, as a person, the athlete.

In order to provide the athlete with comprehensive training, sports psychologists must take into account the daily life of the subjects. Work should focus on: the family with its socio-affective relationships, school or academic training and the sport that is practiced. In each of the areas outlined there is a reference or responsible person, with whom one must work using a multidisciplinary approach. Based on this, objectives are set with a view to:

- Train athletes so they achieve high performance.
- Improve individual and team performance levels.
- Generate competitive levels.
- Train athletes in life skills beyond sports.
- Establish and increase the sense of belonging in athletes in relation to their institution.
- Prepare players to meet high performance demands and, for those who do not achieve this, help them to maturely understand the reasons and causes for this.

Based on this project and intervention model, there are theoretical resources available to address, from psychological departments, the work performed in sports institutions.

In this way we aim to improve the athletic level of each society, club or the sport in general.

1.2.3 Psychology and athletic training

When the coach occupies the role of leader, they must understand the variables determining athletic performance. One of the most important variables is the athlete's behavior and how it can be controlled by sports psychology. Added to this is the knowledge about the benefits of psychological interventions on athletes' mental health, which makes it essential to have a sports psychologist who can report on, create or manage this process within the institution.

The coach is responsible for managing this basic knowledge when working with subjects pursuing an elite project and with those who have already achieved high performance. As mentioned previously, one of the coach's tasks is to train athletes so they can successfully develop in their own sport and who, once retired, are able to apply this knowledge to their life. To this end, being aware of sports psychology's contributions to mental health will become a meaningful variable for athletes who train with coaches who apply this knowledge.

There are numerous studies that aim to demonstrate the benefits of sports for the well-being of humans at the physiological, biological, as well as cognitive levels. Sports psychology is precisely based on this last point.

These benefits are reflected both in short- or long-duration training and in high- or low-intensity training. They all have a positive impact on mental health.

Based on the impact of psychology in sports, we will review some hypotheses supporting the reasons why sports psychologists should be part of institutions and collaborate with the coach as required.

Cognitive hypothesis

In this case work is done to generate positive thoughts that are used to counteract negative ones and improve the athlete's moods. Experiencing positive thoughts helps to break the cycles or spirals of thoughts that negatively affect performance.

Social interaction hypothesis

This hypothesis holds that if training is carried out with peers with whom they are emotionally engaged, the levels of mental health, participation in sports and the sense of belonging are improved.

Distraction hypothesis

This hypothesis argues that training contributes to athlete's being distracted from the concerns or conflicts that subjects experience. It was found that training creates a better mood than any other relaxation or meditation practice (Alferman & Stoll, 2000).

Amine hypothesis

In this case the secretion of chemicals acting as neurotransmitters generate positive moods and mental health. Some studies show that depression is related to low levels of amine such as norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine (North et al., 1990).

Endorphin hypothesis

Training produces chemicals that exert an effect similar to that of morphine (they reduce pain and generate euphoria). Euphoria is generated through the secretion of endorphin which, in turn, reduces anxiety levels, confusion and being overcome with negative thoughts. Kraemer et al. (1990) observed a decrease in plasma endorphin with positive moods. They argue that the release of endorphin might be related to moods.

This information as reviewed above helps subjects understand the importance of having a sports psychologist or coaches who can assess psychological contributions to improve performance.

In many athletic disciplines, coaches are retired athletes with little training and they often reject utilizing psychological resources to work with subjects. The importance of the coach being an agent in continual training is reiterated. Insofar as a coach understands that training athletes must be comprehensive, he will have a different role within the institution.

1.2.4 The role of sport in society

The growth of sport as a consumer good and its inclusion in the economic market have led to certain deviations from the objectives that gave rise to it, one of them being the integral training of the subjects. This has meant that coaches have had to develop the capacity to interpret new market trends and how to adjust accordingly without losing sight of the essential aspects of sport. That is why it is extremely important for coaches to be properly trained and prepared, not only due to the social and athletic reality, but also because of the characteristics of their role and their degree of influence in an athlete's life. The coaching staff of a team can greatly vary from one entity to another, whether in terms of professionalization, financial means, human resources, or the number of athletic disciplines. Each organization is also influenced by the context of its location – a capital city is not the same as a provincial city, or a town on the outskirts of a large city. This determines the material and human resources available.

Some institutions lack resources and only have one coach that is responsible for the management which, in some cases, is carried out by family members collaborating alternately. As it grows, some specific roles are delegated to each area and the coaching staff also increases, until it includes a physiotherapist, nutritionist, podiatrist, sports psychologist, etc. In this way they get transformed into institutions with executive committees responsible for the management and growth.

Incorporating more people requires communication channels to be fluid, as well as a clear initial structure in which the objectives, individual roles and group goals are established. Additionally, a work plan to achieve them must be shared and it should be ensured that everyone knows, broadly speaking, the inputs that will reach athletes.

A sports psychologist can be incorporated into the coaching staff in different ways. Their intervention may be oriented towards different agents and their work may be direct or indirect. That is, a sports psychologist can work, not only with the athletes but also with the members of the coaching team, the managers, the family members, etc. The organization may have a team of psychologists who carry out different types of interventions. In the case of large sports institutions, the team of psychologists is responsible for specific areas, such as: the youth teams, the first team, the coaches, etc. For those institutions that do not have a sports psychologist, the responsibility lies with the coach, who must be trained and qualified to manage the relationships and make the most of each athlete's performance.

Sport in society works as a socializing agent; there is no other activity that includes the members of a society this way. Educational institutions may come to mind however, they are part of the system that is legislated and the subjects have to attend them on a compulsory basis. The phenomenon that occurs in sports is related to subjects who choose, voluntarily (in most cases), to get involved or ask their parents to participate in such practices.

This adds an extra dimension of value, since it is the subjects themselves who make the decision to carry out a physical activity. Then, once they start, they discover the contributions training makes in terms of quality of living. Here are some of the most outstanding ones:

- Contributions to biological, physiological and physical-chemical levels for organic health.
- Contributions to mental health by directly impacting the psychological variables of anxiety, stress, depression, etc.
- It encourages teamwork and camaraderie. If you do not work as a team, you cannot achieve good results.
- It encourages respect for rules and regulations.

This is directly transferred to the subject's life beyond sports. For these reasons the role of sport in society becomes very important and it is the coach's main responsibility to ensure that it develops in the best possible way.

One of the countries that invests the most money in sport is the United States. Its investment is reflected in the achievements at the Olympic level and in the athletic



activities that characterize that country: American football, baseball, etc. It is probably worth studying why 58% of the population of one of the countries making the biggest investment in sport has a sedentary lifestyle. Between 10 and 25% of Americans suffer from depression and anxiety. What role does physical exercise play in this society? Has the battle with the media and junk food been lost? These are some aspects to reflect on in relation to the role of sport in each society.

Norms and values

Each entity, regardless of its size, has a more or less explicit charter of values that reflects the identity of the people who are part of it. Management is responsible for establishing the means for it to be complied with, as well as the club's image renewal if its ethical image is damaged.

In addition to the rules related to the use of the facilities, club membership or to coexistence, the coach must establish internal norms for the team or the group with which he works, namely:

- Locker room norms, adapted to the team and agreed to, in a certain way, with it.
- Housekeeping rules, both in the club facilities and in its living quarters.
- Coexistence and behavior rules: helping each other, collaborating with other areas, being part of activities beyond sports and that require collaboration, respecting rival teams, respecting club members (coaches, maintenance personnel, managers, etc.), greeting others when entering the institution and when leaving, etc.

From when these conduct principles are established, as norms or values, it is important that the consequences for non-compliance also be clarified. Likewise, it must be ensured that all persons belonging to the sports entity are aware of them.

It is also recommended that the incorporation of new athletes, trainers or family members be accompanied by a written commitment of compliance. This will favor moral commitment to these norms and will provide advanced warning regarding the profile of the institution which they are joining.

Based on the content covered in this unit, it can be said that the role of the coach covers a complex and diverse spectrum. The leader of a team or institution is responsible for carrying out his work without losing sight of the aspects outlined.

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