

A Blueprint for Student-Athlete Success: Understanding the Conditions Implemented by High Performance Coaches

Overview: A considerable amount of research has been dedicated to understanding the processes that result in successful teams and organizations outside of the sport context. As one example, Hackman (2012) explains the necessary shift of understanding groups from a proactive pre-work concept rather than the traditional reactive causal model. In proposing this shift, Hackman (2012) describes a condition-setting approach, which outlines the blueprint for success that is established prior to the events leading to the desired outcome or objective of the team and its members. Although derived in the organizational setting, the conditions outlined for team success have clear implications for sport. As several examples, Hackman (2012) advocates that the team must have a *compelling direction or purpose*, be *composed of the right people in both numbers and skills*, have *clear norms of member conduct*, receive *organizational support*, and have *access to competent team-focused coaching*. Despite the empirical support for the significance of satisfying these conditions for team and member performance in non-sport contexts (e.g., Hackman, 2011; Wageman, 2001), the application of these conditions in the sport context has not been investigated. Importantly, Côté, Young, North, and Duffy (2007) state that there are two principles that underlie our understanding of coaching excellence: the application of coaching skill, and their knowledge of the sport and the mental models used. Much of the literature to date has revolved around a coach's ability to translate that knowledge through interpersonal behaviours (e.g., Bloom, 2016), however *less in known in relation to their foresight and the strategies utilized in the pre-work or condition-setting approaches that enable their athletes and teams to reach their full potential*.

Purpose: The aim of this research is to apply Hackman's (2011, 2012) condition-setting framework to the interuniversity sport context to further our understanding of what high performance (HP) coaches spend time planning and implementing to improve the likelihood that their athletes specifically, and teams more generally, will succeed. Essentially, the objective is to acquire an understanding of the "blueprint" that these coaches put in place prior to the beginning of a season in order to provide an enriched sport environment. In doing so, we will be able to contribute additional information to the organizational psychology in sport, which is a growing field that recognizes the contributions of coaches and larger organizations (i.e., intercollegiate athletics) to athlete experiences (e.g., Wagstaff et al., 2012).

Methods: To accomplish this task, I will recruit five current HP interuniversity sport head coaches, five current HP student-athletes, and one current HP director. I will specifically target coaches from programs that have been nationally ranked, and with a minimum of five years coaching experience at the varsity level. Both male and female coaches will be recruited, from both male and female sports teams. They will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews at two time-points. Questions will pertain to the conditions outlined by Hackman (2012), and the first interviews will take place during the off-season (i.e., 1-3 months prior to the beginning of the season). It is expected that this will be the period where coaches are in the process of planning for the upcoming season. The second set of interviews will take place post-season, and coaches will be queried on their ability (based on facilitators and barriers) to have successfully employed their established strategies. For the five HP athletes recruited to the study, they will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview mid-season, discussing their insights and experiences under the conditions set by their coach. Finally, the HP director will be

interviewed at the end of the year, asking to reflect on their overall vision and expectations of the coaches and their respective programs. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, followed by interpretation of the results through thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2017). Finally, I will maintain interview notes and use a reflection journal throughout the duration of the study.

Summary of Proposal: Through my own experiences in elite-level sport and under the co-supervision of coaching and group dynamics experts, Dr. 's Jean Côté and Luc Martin, I am confident in the unique and meaningful contribution of this proposed research study.

References

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