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NEWS UPDATE

Psychosocial coaching practice: an introductory workshop

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INTRODUCTION

In issue 66 of this journal, we presented an interim report outlining the initial findings of an international collaborative action research project with the UKSCA (actually the stakeholders, board of directors, and general secretary). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, this project enabled us to identify gaps of knowledge and understanding with regards to psychosocial coaching competencies within the curriculum of the UKSCA, which we now present here. Psychosocial competencies are essential to the athlete-centred, holistic coaching approach³ that the UKSCA and other coach education programmes aim to promote.⁴

Phase 1: Exploring

In the first phase of this project, we identified and defined the four areas of psychosocial competencies: psychological, pedagogical, philosophical, and sociocultural.² After this, we explored the stakeholders' understanding of these four areas using semi-structured interviews and video scenarios that focused on each individual competency.⁵ Our results suggested that stakeholders could identify psychological competencies – eg, developing trust and respect – very well, but when it came to pedagogical competencies, such as questioning and feedback, and philosophical competencies, such as values, these tended to get regarded as psychological competencies. The stakeholders struggled to identify sociocultural issues and how coaches might engage with those, which is commonly the case as people take for granted

socialised beliefs and unconscious biases. In sport, common manifestations of this relate to the dominance of masculinity, the authority of performance-orientations (winning), and the singular importance of some science (physiology and biomechanics).

Our findings suggested that it is difficult to identify normalised coaching practices that reinforce and legitimise male-dominant-gendered behaviour and emotions (and therefore justifies subordination of women and other marginalised ways of being), behaviour which is commonly referred to as 'hegemonic masculinity'. For example, microaggressions – which are common intentional or unintentional comments that are negative and derogatory towards marginalised groups – are often accepted as banter, a normalised expression of masculinity.



Figure 1. The four elements of psychosocial coaching competencies

Interestingly, being athlete-centred, which was considered a positive coaching approach, was also identified as being guided by the dominant performance-oriented scientific coaching discourse. We discovered that the S&C culture is athlete-centred only in so far as the coach supports the athlete's sport performance, but not necessarily the whole person. Therefore, ideas of the coach developing trust, respect, and care for the athlete were valued because it led to buy-in from the athlete to do what the coach wanted them to do, with the primary aim of improving athlete performance.

We do not argue that athlete performance is a primary function of S&C coaching, but we do point this out to encourage and strengthen current calls within the S&C community to address issues of equity and holistic development.

Phase Two: Suggestions for change

In Phase Two, we presented the results of Phase One to the stakeholders (N=26) and held focus groups and interviews to discuss whether and how psychosocial competencies could be incorporated into the UKSCA curriculum.¹ Using narrative thematic analysis to analyse the data, stakeholders identified the current curriculum as scientific and objective, and they explored how psychosocial competencies are currently learned through experience.

Next, they debated the need for changing the curriculum. Some stakeholders argued for no need to change, whereas others argued for change. Ultimately, they recommended

the creation of a new module or workshops, including teaching and promoting effective critical reflection through more organised and accountable mentorship programmes. They suggested that mentorship and critical reflection could be an extension of a workshop to provide an experiential and innovative coach education module that focused on psychosocial competencies (for the full results please refer to Callary, ref no 1).

Phase Three: Developing the 'Introduction to psychosocial coaching competency workshop'

The next logical step of this collaborative action research project is to develop an initial workshop that introduces the four elements of psychosocial coaching practice. This workshop will be held online and will last up to three hours: the aim is for stakeholders to identify specific psychosocial competencies that S&C coaches need to develop (see Figure 1).

This workshop should be seen as the start of the journey to develop psychosocial coaching competencies in the UKSCA curriculum. The initial workshops were held on June 14 and 15, 2023. We will now evaluate their effectiveness: each workshop participant will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview, and we will use the value creation framework to guide our questioning about the potential value of this workshop for the UKSCA.⁶ We aim to understand how we might enhance the delivery and content of the workshop. The results from our evaluation

will be presented at the UKSCA's annual conference.

Conclusion

The inclusion of psychosocial competencies will strengthen UKSCA-accredited coaches' approaches. This workshop is a pilot towards further exciting endeavours within the UKSCA curriculum and will help address current equity, diversity, and inclusion issues in the S&C context. Together with

the UKSCA, this is an important time to move forward and explore the possibility of developing effective psychosocial coach education in S&C, which could hopefully encourage other S&C certification bodies and other coach education providers to follow suit.

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Chris is a senior lecturer and researcher in S&C at Hartpury University, where he leads the MSc in S&C programme. His research involves examining psychosocial and sociocultural effective coaching behaviours, using innovative qualitative methods to disseminate findings to the applied practitioner. He is a UKSCA-accredited S&C coach, tutor, and assessor. He has over 14 years' experience as an elite S&C coach, working with multiple Olympic and world champions, within a variety of different sports (eg, sailing, cricket, wheelchair basketball).



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Bettina is the Canada Research Chair in sport coaching and adult learning. She is also an associate professor in the department of experiential studies in community and sport at Cape Breton University in Nova Scotia, Canada. She researches coach education and development, and psychosocial understandings of inclusive coaching. She is editor-in-chief of the *International Sport Coaching Journal*, and also co-editor for two books: *Coach Education and Development in Sport: Instructional Strategies* and *Coaching Masters Athletes: Advancing Research and Practice in Adult Sport*.



BRIAN T GEARITY, PhD

Brian is a full professor, Associate Dean, and director of online graduate degrees in sport and an undergraduate major/minor in kinesiology and sport studies at the University of Denver. He co-edited the book *Coach Education and Development in Sport: Instructional Strategies* and co-authored *Understanding Strength and Conditioning as Sport Coaching: Bridging the Biophysical, Pedagogical and Sociocultural Foundations of Practice*. He is editor-in-chief for the NSCA's practitioner journal *NSCA Coach* and associate editor-in-chief of *Strength & Conditioning Journal*.

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