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# DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOTBALL COACHES IN AUSTRALIA AND MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

Sport coaches play a crucial role in contributing to individual and team performance. Unlike the scientific study of athlete development, scant attention has been paid to the intricacies of coach development across the full spectrum of coaching levels. In the current research the defining stage development characteristics of A, B and C license soccer (hereafter referred to as football) coaches in Australia and Malaysia, were interviewed about their development journey, especially dating back to their first involvement in football through to the present.

### Methods

This research was guided by evolved grounded theory (EGT), (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) principles. Evolved grounded theory was used and is well suited to developing an understanding of the complexities of sport coaching development (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). Furthermore, EGT is inherently adaptable and is data driven but with the capacity to consider relevant research with a view to developing an explanatory model. Coaches' learning changes as they learn from different sources that change their cognitive structure (Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Suitable accredited football coaches were progressively recruited based on the principles of theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

### Interviews

In-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to explore how participants organized and understood their coaching development perspectives and experiences. I used a semi-structured interview guide with a recursive design, whereby themes were identified and explored in later interviews. The transcripts from twenty-four interviews conducted over an 11-month period in Australia and



Malaysia were transcribed and analyzed according to EGT principles. Probe questions were also used to explore idiographic themes and issues relevant to each interviewee. Initially data analysis involved creating verbatim transcripts of each interview resulting in 372 pages of single spaced text. Following the principle of Strauss & Corbin's, (1990) EGT, I systematically conducted data construction, data deconstruction, and data reconstruction stages.

## Results

As expected, development emerged as a central overarching category. Based on the analysis, the following four core development themes emerged, a) pre-accreditation, b) characteristics, c) learning and d) challenges. These core categories were relevant for both Australian and Malaysian football coach samples were underpinned by over 15 selected common codes, over 70 axial codes and close to 3,000 open codes. These four development themes formed the basis for the resultant evolved grounded model. Although the development themes for the Australian and Malaysian coaches were very similar two sub-themes related to egalitarianism coaching attitudes in Australia and hierarchical practices in Malaysia emerged.

## Conclusion

The use of EGT proved to be a useful methodology to delineate key development themes for accredited football coaches across a wide spectrum of coaching contexts. The aims of the study were achieved and the accredited football coach development model (AFCDM) will hopefully provide an impetus to examine further coach development and particularly strategies and techniques to ensure all coaches are well supported, trained and developed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In sport, football is referred to as soccer in Australia, is often considered the most popular and influential sport internationally (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1994). Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to use the term football rather than soccer. Given the cultural significance of sport (see Kinkema & Harris, 1998), and football, in particular, the organizations that regulate football are considered major forces. Indeed, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is a major trans-global socio-economic and cultural-ideological force (Sklair, 1991). There are approximately 250 million football players worldwide (Goldblatt & Acton, 2010). The cumulative television audience of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in Africa reached over 3.2 billion people worldwide, and the global football industry has been valued at more than \$500 billion per year (Murray, 2011). Currently, FIFA has 209 member countries, more than any other global organization, including the United Nations (FIFA, 2014).

There are currently an estimated 780,000 male and 190,000 female players registered representing 2,300 registered clubs with the Football Federation Australia (Goldblatt & Acton). Football is currently the most popular sport among Australian children in participation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The most popular sport in Malaysia is football (Pundyk, 2004). In the FIFA world rankings, Malaysia was ranked at 166th (FIFA, 2016). There are currently an estimated 9,930 registered and 575,000 unregistered players reported in Malaysia (National Football Development Program Malaysia, 2014). Football, however, is still considered as the number one sport in Malaysia, based on television audiences (Hamid & Kendall, 2008).

The corresponding total number of accredited football coaches in Australian and Malaysia is arguably less than required to support the growth of football. For example, according to Football Federation Australia (2009), there are approximately 3,000 active and registered coaches in Victoria, with 17,000 registered on FFV database as having completed a course, but are not necessarily active. In Malaysia, there are 11 Professional Diploma coaches, and more than 700 B license coaches (318 Advanced coaches-equivalent to B license), more than 4,000 C license coaches (more than 1,000 Preliminary coaches-equivalent to C license, (Gopalkrishnan, personal communication, March 1, 2012). Therefore, investigating the development pathway for Australian and Malaysian football coaches is highly relevant to ensuring demand for high quality coaches are met across all levels.

According to Mageau and Vallerand (2003), although football is increasingly popular and has a crucial role to play in developing players' performance, the support systems available are generally in place for the player, not the coach. Collectively, coaches are expected to produce outstanding results at the professional level, but also play a central role in fostering the "social capital" and healthy living at the grassroots and community levels (Nathan, Birourre, Evers, Mackenzie & Henly, 2010). Nathan et al. claims, the coach, is vital at the community level because sport can be a mechanism to promote social cohesion, encourage strong community bonds, and to access positive mentors. These positive influences are particularly important for communities with a high proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. FIFA prioritizes the importance of football as a vehicle for healthy and positive development of participants at the community level.

With the sheer scale of football participation worldwide it is difficult to underestimate the collective influence that coaches play in the lives of participants.

Consequently, building robust systems and infrastructure to recruit, develop and support football coaches is necessary. According to Berger (2011) and Peacock (2008) coaches need stronger support if the football governing bodies and ruling governments are serious about football progressing. With sport coaching science research there is a growing body of evidence that can potentially be applied to support coach development. For example, researchers investigating coaching effectiveness almost universally report that coaches greatly influence an athlete's performance, behavior, and emotional well-being (e.g., Andrew, 2009; Chelladurai, 1990). Although it is difficult to determine specifically, the uptake of recently acquired coaching science knowledge by sports organizations, the growth in University based sport coaching programs and relevant research provides an ongoing source of new knowledge. The current doctoral research was used to focus specifically on understanding the key development needs of football coaches with the anticipation that this knowledge be potentially disseminated where appropriate, using the principles of knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE).

Football coaching can be a fulfilling and rewarding vocation. Inherent in the coaching role, however, are many challenges and stressors. Football coaches face demanding schedules and time commitments, excessive workloads, conflicting roles and the pressure to win and cope with defeat. According to Surujlal and Nguyen (2011) football coaches face challenges, frustrations, conflicts and tensions, the enormity of which can be underestimated. McNamara (2001) suggests the "chaotic lifestyle" of a sports coach includes travel, regular dislocation from family and friends, long undefined hours, limited time for oneself; and lack of job security. McNamara also stated that the complex and extraordinary demands placed on coaches also stem from having to perform multiple roles including educator, motivator, counselor,

advisor, trainer, manager and administrator. Research designed to illuminate better the key challenges for coaches at points along the development journey can potentially be applied to support coaches in both anticipating and responding to these challenges. Coaches who are better informed and more conversant with the key challenges they will likely face as they develop should be better placed to respond proactively in their development journey. Thus, investigating the development pathway of coaches should be a vital source of knowledge to ensure coaches are deriving the task satisfaction that can sustain their ongoing self-efficacy and coaching involvement.

One of the main ways to enhance coaching preparedness, efficacy and effectiveness are through coaching education programs (Feltz, Short & Sullivan,

2008). To provide continuous growth and development, all coaches need quality coach education programs to assist coaches in developing a growth mindset

(Treasure, 2007). Numerous countries have invested in structured coach education, including; the United Kingdom through the UK Coaching Certification initiative and UK sports coach; Canada through the National Coaching Certification Program; United States of America through the National Council for the Accreditation of Coach Education and Australia through the National Coach Accreditation Scheme (Trudel, 2007). Researchers have demonstrated that many coaches do not perceive that their coach education courses delivered the type of information required to improve their coaching skills and expertise (Fung, 2004; Jones & Turner, 2006; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Some experts have also suggested that the available coaching education courses are often presented and assessed in a format that does not encourage learning (Abraham & Collins, 1998; Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Haslam, 1990). The reality is that many coaches attribute the development of their coaching knowledge to

their experience observing other coaches (Coaching Association of Canada, 1998; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001). Furthermore, the stages and critical issues of coach' development are considered important in the design and presentation of coach education courses (Erickson, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). The results of the current research should provide relevant knowledge for coaching coordinators of governing bodies to tailor training by incorporating evidence-based education on coach development themes.

Over the last fifteen years, considerable emphasis has been placed on the identification and development of sporting talent with the establishment of talent identification development (TID) systems in numerous countries, e.g., Australia (Hoare, 2000). The focus, however, has almost exclusively been on TID athletes with little consideration to identifying and developing talented coaches. Houlihan (2000) suggests that national sport's governing bodies, coach education providers, sports clubs and youth organizations should work together more effectively to enhance the performance development pathway or a system to identify, develop and support coaches as well as athletes. That is, better support and development for sport coaches has multiple benefits. These benefits will likely fit within the broader domain of providing support to enhance the coaching experience and link to perceived benefits and satisfaction for coaches, rather than purely as a conduit to a better experience for athletes.

Collectively, sports coaches and coach education coordinators need to understand how coaches develop through the stages of development to inform the best training possible (Wiman, Salmoni & Hall, 2010). Nash and Sproule (2011) state that in the sports context, the conceptual and theoretical examination of these stages is somewhat limited, especially in the community or novice level across the full

spectrum of issues that affect the coaches. Nash and Sproule (2009, 2011), also believe more attention is required to understand the pathways that coaches follow, as there is a paucity of information as to how coaches develop and transition.

The overarching research question for the present study was; how do Australian and Malaysian football coaches understand their development needs at different levels of coaching? In the present research evolved grounded theory Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used to examine critical development themes for accredited Australian and Malaysian football coaches at different license levels (i.e., 'C', 'B' and 'A' levels). A comprehensive review of literature is used to discuss sport coaching and especially relevant research in sport coach development. For the reasons listed above the general aim of the research was to delineate the primary coach development themes from the perspective of accredited Australian and Malaysian football coaches.

In this study, I explored how accredited Australian and Malaysian football coaches with "A", "B" and "C" viewed their development. The multiple country approach corresponds to the recommendation by Erickson, et al. (2007) who suggested that additional coach development research in a range of countries would add depth to the overall understanding of coach development. Similarly, Morgan (2006) has concluded that football is an under-researched area regarding coach development. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to elicit the coaches' views, experiences and plans. The question guide used in the interviews evolved iteratively and was grounded in the theoretical concepts outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The interview data was subjected to EGT principles that enable coding, analysis and retrieval of the data. The experiences, reflections, thoughts, feelings and personal introspections formed the constituent data. Specifically, the



concept of how coaches view themselves in terms of their development was explored in addition to early life experiences that collectively shaped their later development as a coach. The resulting accredited football coach development model (AFCDM) presented in Chapter 4 evolved from numerous iterations.





## THESIS STRUCTURE

### Chapter 1 Introduction

The first purpose of the introduction was to demonstrate the popularity of football globally and thereby demonstrate the huge number of accredited football coaches that are required to meet current and expected demand. The second purpose was to link the importance of sport coaches in contributing to healthy communities and social capital. The third purpose was to demonstrate that ongoing coach development is partly contingent on the need for institutional support including well-planned accreditation and training programs. That is, quality training and accreditation are an important cog in equipping coaches to negotiate their development pathway successfully, respond to challenges and attain crucial knowledge of how to be the best coach they can be. The fourth purpose was to introduce the participant sample and methods used in the study. The overarching research question for the present study was; how do Australian and Malaysian football coaches understand their development needs at different levels of coaching? The research method (EGT) was intentionally employed to answer the research question, purpose and aims by facilitating the development of a football coach development model.

### Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose was to review the relevant literature of global trends in sports coaching and specifically development themes of coaches at different points along the development pathway. The review is also used to introduce and contextualize some defining features that inform the study; including, the selected sport (football) in two South East Asian countries; Australia and Malaysia from which participants in the current research were recruited. Overarching global and generic themes such as

coaching role expectations, coaching effectiveness, coach training and education, and coaching challenges are then discussed. The review is then intentionally focused on areas directly related to coach development, including sections on coach education, career development, coaching pathways and stages of coach development. Finally, the rationale for conducting the study is discussed. See Appendix A for key operational terms used.

### **Chapter 3 Method**

The research method chapter is used to describe participants, procedures, and relevant background information. Furthermore, the method chapter was used to frame the design of the study and key features of the data collection and analysis process. The reasons Evolved Grounded Theory (EGT) methodology was chosen are explained in addition to descriptions of the participants and procedures.

### **Chapter 4 The Study**

The first purpose of chapter four is to establish and delineate the coach development for journey for accredited football coaches in Australia and Malaysia. A second associated purpose was to develop a grounded model of accredited football coach development. A final purpose was to focus on similarities and differences in cross-culturally. Throughout the chapter, representative quotes are used to demonstrate the axial, common and core themes extracted from interviews with twenty-four coaches that informed model development.

### **Chapter 5 General Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter is used to summarize and draw together the main findings. First, the general discussion is provided to summarize the results of the study, especially the most salient points that emerged such as the challenges that coaches face, the range of learning development opportunities that coaches engage in and



characteristics related to coach development. Also, discussions of the specific limitations of the current studies are discussed. Finally, the conclusions are presented in the context of recommended areas for additional research and transferring the findings of the present study into a practical context.

