Seeking conceptual clarity in the study of elite professional coaches and managers in rugby union and association football

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Research Questions

1. What is the difference between a ‘coach’, ‘head coach’ and ‘manager’ in professional football and rugby union?

2. What constitutes towards defining an expert coach at the elite performance level? (Côté, Young, North & Duffy, 2007)

3. How do coaches acquire coaching knowledge and attain expertise status? (Cushion et al, 2010)
Literature’s Sample Critique

• Have past studies been sampling appropriately?
  • Nash, Martindale, Collins & Martindale (2012)

• Ericsson, Prietula and Cokely (2007) define expertise as;
  • Measurable - outcome
  • Performance is consistently performed
  • Generated over a prolonged period of time
Sampling Critique

- Ericsson, Prietula and Cokely (2007) define that attaining genuine expertise status requires:
  - Individuals engaging in deliberate practice
  - Eliminating weaknesses with deliberate thinking

- Expert’s decision making can become:
  - Automatic – *habituation = routine practice*

- ‘Intuition biases’
  - ‘Ineffective to explain what makes them experts’

‘Anecdotal, selective recall, and one-off events all can present insufficient, often misleading, examples of expertise’ (ibid, p.3).
## Theoretical Sample

### Employers of elite coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Club Level Competition</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Premier League</td>
<td>Association Football</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Football Operations</td>
<td>Championship</td>
<td>Association Football</td>
<td>Eric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>League One</td>
<td>Association Football</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Team Manager</td>
<td>Premiership</td>
<td>Rugby Union</td>
<td>Shaun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive &amp; Performance</td>
<td>Championship</td>
<td>Rugby Union</td>
<td>Kirk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Rugby</td>
<td>English National League One</td>
<td>Rugby Union</td>
<td>Ron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Rugby</td>
<td>Championship</td>
<td>Rugby Union</td>
<td>Keith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

What is the *difference* between a ‘coach’ and ‘manager’?

*What* constitutes towards defining an expert coach at this level?

*How* do coaches acquire knowledge and attain expertise status?

### Roles and responsibilities

**Director of Rugby (DoR)/Manager – Head Coach**

1. Philosophy
2. Recruitment of staff
3. On field results accountability
4. Team selection
5. Performance plan and review
6. Budget expenditure

**Coach**

1. Athlete development

### Head Coach/Coach development

1. ‘Substantial’ playing background required
   - sport specific knowledge
   - tactical and technical appreciation
2. Credibility but is not perceived to last long.
   Respect important.
3. Same club fast-tracking – socialised into club culture.
4. Coaching qualifications not universally highly regarded.
5. Maturity – life experiences

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Role dynamics

No, no we are not going to take someone who just says we’ll hoof it up the pitch...

Eric (Director of Football Operations, Championship)

...We have got a playing style which we think is important for the club...

Eric (Director of Football Operations, Championship)

...we have got a playing philosophy, you know again it’s a small world we know who works hard, and who is there just purely for the money and will work a little as possible. They’ve got to have that same yeah culture that we have.

Shaun (Chief Exec, League One)

...so that’s what we would ask...

Shaun (Chief Exec, League One)

Samuel (First Team Manager, Premiership Rugby Club)
Head Coach Expertise Constructs

Leadership
- Figurehead
- Have ‘the’ vision
- Implement the vision
  - Arrogance

Talent ID
- Players
- Coaches
- Mentors
  - Honesty

Credibility/Respect
- Experience
- Knowledge
- Results
  - Affable

Empathy
Leadership

Figurehead

Have a vision

Implement the vision

Again it’s that leadership... leadership, it’s the ability to get the vision... It’s that ability to enrol people you know, to have a vision...

Oliver (MD Premier League Football Club)
Samuel (CE League One Football Club)

Oh Christ yeah you have had to have played the game I would have thought. ...in terms of being a great manager and knowledgeable and had the contacts and he was an affable character he was going to get on well with the fans and he had that arrogance that sort of successful side to him you know he’d be ok for us.

Ron (Director of Rugby Nation League)

At whatever level you would have had to play first team rugby, erm you would have had to have played first team rugby in the national divisions, I think.
Theoretical Discussion (Bourdieu, 1977)

- Coaches = *arbiters of taste* when identifying playing talent (Christensen, 2009)

- Arbiters of taste = the club hierarchy
  - Board members act as ‘*cultural custodians*’ of club values when making managerial appointments with the candidate being required to *embody* the club values = Hexis
  - Managerial and coach appointments largely remain within the field which facilitates perpetuating a *fast-tracking* culture of appointing elite athletes to elite coaching positions = Doxa $\rightarrow$ Symbolic Violence (BME, females??)
Theoretical Discussion (Bourdieu, 1977)

- Why are elite athletes considered pertinent candidates for direct entry into elite managerial/coaching positions?
  - Cultural capital developed through playing career = credibility
  - Symbolic capital earned from playing and coaching tenure = respect
Selected References


Thank you for listening.
Grounded Theory

Figure 1. The grounded theory process (Weed, 2009).