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Developing politically astute football coaches: An evolving framework for coach learning and coaching research

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Abstract

In this chapter, we provide an initial sketch of an evolving framework for supporting the development of politically astute coaches and promoting future coaching inquiry in this topic area. It is one which integrates Hartley and colleagues' (2013, 2015, 2017) ground-breaking scholarship with key concepts from symbolic interactionist (e.g., Grills & Prus, 2019; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017; Thoits, 1996), dramaturgical (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1967; Hochschild, 1983) and relational (e.g., Crossley, 2011) sociology. In terms of its structure, the chapter begins with a short introduction. Following this, background information on the origin and development of Hartley and colleagues' (2013, 2015, 2017) framework of political astuteness is provided. The focus then shifts to considering several key elements of her framework. These are Personal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Reading People and Situations, and Building Alignment and Alliances. Within each section, we a) define the component, b) consider its applicability to coaching, c) suggest future related lines of coaching research, and d) briefly outline relevant concepts from symbolic interactionist (e.g., identity and interests), dramaturgical (e.g., impression management, team performance, the intra and inter-personal management of emotion) and relational (e.g., social network mapping and analysis) theorising that could be utilised to enrich coach learning. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarising, and reflecting on, the key points raised.

Introduction

> I've learned that how you deal with the political side of the job can really impact on how successful you can be as a coach… The more you know about that side of things, the more you can do with your coaching knowledge and practical skills. (Thompson, Potrac & Jones, 2015, p. 986)

> I had to persuade the players, board and fans at the club. Not an easy task, and not something that you coach education people talk about on your courses! (Potrac & Jones, 2009a, p. 565)

In recent years, researchers have increasingly explored the micropolitical nature of coaching. Indeed, studies conducted in various community (e.g., Gale, Ives, Potrac & Nelson, 2019; Ives, Gale, Potrac & Nelson, 2021; Potrac, Mallett, Greenough & Nelson, 2017) and performance oriented settings (e.g., Hall, Martindale, Sproule, Kelly & Potrac, in press; Magill, Nelson, Jones & Potrac, 2017; Nelson, Potrac & Groom, 2014; O'Gorman, Partington, Potrac & Nelson, in press; Thompson, Potrac & Jones, 2015) have highlighted how coaching entails far more than the unproblematic application of technical, tactical and bio-scientific knowledge, or the straightforward application of pre-packaged pedagogical methods and approaches (Jones, 2019; Potrac & Jones, 2009b). Instead, the evolving literature base in this topic area has illustrated some of the ways in which coaching settings are a) subject to ideological diversity, b) may be riven with, or have the potential for, inter-personal conflict, and c) can be influenced by the hopes, fears, wishes and expectations of the different stakeholders (e.g., coaches, athletes/participants, parents, administrators, sponsors, and policy makers) that comprise them (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2016; Potrac et al., 2013). Similarly, co-operation and negotiation have also been shown to be dynamic and fluid entities that coaches need to actively consider and reflexively engage with in their everyday practice (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Gale et al., 2019; Hall et al., in press). Collectively,

the scholarship described above suggests that the influence coaches have is inextricably tied to their ability to read people and situations, develop and maintain productive relationships, manage the version of the self that is presented to others, as well as their willingness to proactively engage with challenging issues and situations (e.g., pressure and resistance from others) (Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne & Nelson, 2013; Potrac, Nichol, & Hall, 2020).

While we are pleased to see micropolitics gaining increasing traction in academic conceptualisations of coaching (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2016; Jones, 2019), its potential to support the learning and development of coaches remains largely untapped (Potrac, Nichol & Hall, 2020). On one level, this situation may reflect the contested intellectual and political terrain of coaching and coach education, which is "dotted with its own interest groups, philosophical and ideological tensions and border police" (Potrac et al., 2013, pp. 83-84). For example, some believe that micropolitical insights are too negative or unrealistic to fit with the representation of coaching that they or their organisation subscribes to, while others consider this topic to be too messy or 'intellectual' to be of any practical use. For us, this view fails to recognise that, alongside helping us to understand the dynamics of interpersonal conflict, micropolitical theorising can also enable us to more productively engage with the acts of collaboration and negotiation that comprise everyday life in sports organisations (Jones, 2019; Potrac, 2019; Potrac & Jones, 2009a, 2009b). On another level, it may reflect the often unintentionally distant relationship that can exist between coaching researchers, coach educators, and coach education policy makers. As each group grapples with the increasing intensification of their working roles and the subsequent need to pursue particular priorities, objectives and goals, opportunities to constructively consider and discuss how these empirical and theoretical insights might be applied and, indeed, further developed to support coach learning become infrequent or are lost.

In order to address the issues outlined above, we are currently engaged in a cross-institutional project (i.e., Northumbria University, University College Dublin and Cardiff Metropolitan University) to develop a framework that could be used to variously guide and support coaching research, coach learning, and curriculum development in this topic area. In this chapter, we provide an initial sketch of our work to date, which will, of course, be subject to further development, revision and research. The framework we share in this chapter is one which integrates Hartley and colleagues' (2013, 2015, 2017) ground-breaking scholarship, related ideas for future coaching research, and key concepts from symbolic interactionist (e.g., Grills & Prus, 2019; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017; Thoits, 1996), dramaturgical (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1967; Hochschild, 1983) and relational (e.g., Crossley, 2011) theorising. After this introduction, we briefly outline the origins and development of Hartley and colleagues' (2013, 2015, 2017) conceptualisation of political astuteness. The focus then shifts to considering several key elements of their framework. These are Personal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Reading People and Situations, and Building Alignment and Alliances. Within each section, we a) define the component, b) consider its applicability to coaching, c) suggest future related lines of coaching research, and d) briefly outline relevant concepts from symbolic interactionist (e.g., identity and interests), dramaturgical (e.g., impression management, performance teams, the intra and inter-personal management of emotion) and relational (e.g., social network mapping and analysis) theory that could be utilised to enrich coach learning. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarising the key points raised.

Political astuteness skills: An important facet of leader (coach) development

Reflecting recent debates in the coaching literature (e.g., Jones, 2019; Potrac, 2019), Hartley (2017) lamented the fact that, despite being recognised as an "endemic and integral feature of organisations, partnerships, social movements and societies" (p. 201), micropolitics has been afforded little attention in both the scholarship of leadership and leadership preparation and

development programmes. For her, and others (e.g., Alvesson & Sveningson, 2012; Baddeley & James, 1987; Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Butcher & Clarke, 2008; Ferris et al., 2005, 2007), leadership in public, private, and voluntary sectors entails far more than the sharing of a compelling vision that unproblematically leads to "completely shared goals and a consensus about action and approach to a task or purpose" (Hartley, 2017, p. 205). Instead, she argued that leaders' efforts to "mobilise attention, resources and people", are characterised by fragility and fluidity (Hartley, 2017, p. 5). These stem from the dynamic social realities of organisational life, which variously require leaders to a) recognise and navigate the diverse interests of various individuals and groups, b) continually analyse and, where necessary, win back the commitment that they receive from these others, and c) strive to facilitate and support productive engagements between the individuals and groups that comprise their own and other organisations (Hartley, 2017). In order to help leader engagement with these crucial issues, Hartley (2017) advocates for more attention (and value) to be given to the development of leaders' political astuteness skills by researchers and educators. For her, these skills include a wide range of relational, cognitive, behavioural, and affective capabilities that are connected to both the reading of organisational context and stakeholders interests and, relatedly, the intra- and interpersonal strategies that leaders use to constructively influence others (Hartley, 2017).

In addition to the insightful critiques outlined above, Hartley and colleagues have also made a substantial empirical contribution to our understanding of leaders' political astuteness. Specifically, following extensive fieldwork in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, they developed a five-dimensional framework of political astuteness (see Hartley et al., 2007; Hartley et al., 2015; Manzie & Hartley, 2014; Alford et al., 2016). This framework conceptualises political astuteness beyond a narrow focus on 'heroic' or self-interested leaders and is organised from the 'micro' personal level to the 'macro' strategic

level. The specific dimensions are a) Personal Skills, b) Interpersonal Skills, c) Reading People and Situations, d) Building Alignment and Alliances and e) Strategic Direction and Scanning. In the remainder of this chapter, we introduce and discuss the first four components of this framework. The fifth aspect of Hartley's (2017) framework, Strategic Direction and Scanning, is omitted from this chapter due to space considerations. This component is concerned with leaders' long-term thinking and road maps towards organisational goals, their understandings of, and responses to, external issues that might impact upon their organisation, and their ability to work across organisations as well as within them. We recognise that these are pressing concerns for those in working in certain coaching roles, as well as those engaged in coach development provision, and it is certainly something that we will explore in more depth elsewhere. However, we believe that the four components explored in this chapter provide some initial 'food for thought' regarding the development of football coaches' political astuteness skills.

Personal Skills

For Hartley (2017), the personal skills dimension of the framework is concerned with the self-awareness of leaders, especially as it is connected to their own motives, choices, behaviours, and ability to exercise self-control. In addition, this component also addresses a leader's willingness to a) sincerely listen to, and consider, alternative views, insights and ideas provided by others, and b) adopt a proactive approach to engaging with situations, events and relationships. Importantly, Hartley (2017) argued that, without the firm underpinning of personal skills, leaders will be less effective in developing the higher order skills that comprise the rest of this framework. This outlook is supported by Grills and Prus (2019, p. 210), who argued that "the capacity of human actors to engage in self-reflection, to be the object of our own action, and to adopt the perspective of the other" are essential in

enabling individuals to fully frame and critically reflect on their engagement in their leadership roles.

When connected to coaching, a widespread but surface-level discourse about the virtues of personal skills is already evident, and has been for some time (e.g., Smoll and Smith, 1980). Indeed, self-reflection has been so strongly advocated through coach education and professional development programmes around the world, as a means to monitor one's own practice and to raise self-awareness, that it seems coach developers and practitioners believe it is *the* key to becoming an effective coach (Cushion, 2018). However, this unproblematic promotion of reflection, and the lack of specific support coaches are given to develop critical self-awareness, reflects the limited appreciation of the discursive complexities of personal skills both in coach education and, indeed, the little existing research in this area (Hall & Gray, 2016). Much work has examined coach behaviour (e.g., Hall et al., 2016), but it has tended to do so without investigating how such actions are also underpinned by or infused with personal motives, intentions, beliefs and meanings (Nichol, Hall, Vickery, & Hayes, 2019). Indeed, the *who* of the coach, incorporating their biographies, emotions and philosophies, along with the connections between these things and *what* the coach does, *how* they do it, with w*hom*, *when* and *why*, have arguably been most neglectfully omitted in existing scholarship (Jones, 2019).

Both coach learning and coaching research in this dimension could be productively informed by Kelchtermans' (2009a, 2009b) writings addressing the personal interpretive framework and his related discussions of professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory. The personal interpretive framework represents the set of cognitions and beliefs that an individual uses to make sense of their workplace (inclusive of the actions of others) and, indeed, guide their practice and actions. Rather than being set in stone, this understanding can be modified and revised as a consequence of our ongoing engagement

with other people and events (Kelchtermans, 1993, 2009a, 2009b). For Kelchtermans (1993, 2009a, 2009b), the personal interpretive framework consists of two interrelated domains. These are professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory. The former is concerned with how an individual understands themself as a coach and is made up of five components (self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspectives). The latter, meanwhile, refers to "the personal systems of knowledge and beliefs" that an individual uses to guide their interpretations, choices and actions (Kelchtermans, 2009a, p. 264). Importantly, it represents our responses to questions regarding how we think we should deal with particular situations and issues, as well as why we believe our chosen approaches (or strategies) to be appropriate (Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b). Combined, professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory enable us to critically consider what we want to achieve in our coaching roles, the ways in which we believe these outcomes could be achieved, and, importantly, the potential benefits and limitations of our established ways of thinking and acting (Cassidy et al., 2016; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017).

Mason's (2002) conceptualisation of noticing, as well as its nuanced application to coaching by others (e.g., Jones, Bailey, & Thompson, 2013; Jones, 2019), has much to offer our discussion, and development, of personal skills. For Mason (2002), noticing lies at the heart of our everyday practice and is primarily concerned with our ability to identify opportunities to act appropriately. While much of our noticing is undertaken in a casual or unconscious way, he argued that, if harnessed appropriately, it has the potential to become a powerful developmental tool. In his text, *The Discipline of Noticing*, Mason (2002) identified three forms or levels of noticing. These are a) ordinary-noticing, b) marking, and c) recording. Ordinary-noticing refers to *perceiving* or *sensing* something (e.g., the response of an athlete or assistant coach to feedback) and distinguishing it from its surroundings.

Marking is a heightened form of noticing where an individual is able to initiate mention of what has been noticed. As identified by Mason (2002, p. 33), "to *mark* something is to be able to re-mark upon it later to others". Such noticing has the capacity to make incidents more likely to be available for access, reflection and reconstruction in order to inform and shape subsequent (inter)action. Finally, recording relates to making a note or record of an incident or event (e.g., in a reflective journal). Indeed, orienting such detailed attention to occurrences which would perhaps otherwise pass us by provides a strong framework for developing individual sensemaking. In terms of developing the political astuteness skills of coaches, then, we believe Mason's (2002) approach could be employed to help coaches to develop a greater appreciation of their organisational contexts and underpin skilled social interaction, especially as it concerns how individuals relate to each other, form in and out groups, hold conflicting (espoused and underlying) agendas, and experience particular "dilemmas, joys, and paranoias" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 277).

Finally, we also believe that a coach's intrapersonal skill-set includes being able to strategically manage and manipulate (as much as is humanly possible) the emotions that they display to, or hide from, others. Indeed, Nelson, Potrac, Gale, Allanson, and Marshall (2012) have illustrated how the ability to recognise, and display, situationally appropriate emotions can impact upon the influence a coach has on, as well as the ways that they may be responsively treated by, others. For us, such work highlights the applied potential of Hochschild's (1983) dramaturgical insights in two ways. The first is concerned with helping coaches to develop an understanding of display rules regarding the situational expression of emotions (Hochschild, 1983). This could include, for example, recognising potential benefits of displaying an 'enthusiastic' face in a meeting with club administrators or, indeed, suppressing intense feelings of frustration towards athletes after an unintentionally poor team performance (Nelson et al., 2013; Potrac & Marshall, 2011). Grills and Prus (2019) similarly

outlined the importance for leaders to develop intimate understandings of the affective landscapes of the organisations and subcultures in which they are enmeshed. The second, meanwhile, relates to how coaches might strategically exercise self-control in the way they seek to display their emotions to others. Here, such learning may consider how surface and deep acting techniques could be used in everyday coaching practice. The former could include, for example, smiling or displaying empathy for others' benefit (even when we do not feel these emotions inside) or using exhortations to feel particular emotions (e.g., "I summoned up the courage to have that difficult conversation with the player's parents") (Cassidy et al., 2016: Potrac & Marshall, 2011; Potrac et al., in press).

Sadly, emotions have, until relatively recently, been largely unexplored in the coaching literature (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2017; Martinelli, Day, & Lowry, 2017; Potrac et al., 2017). As such, there remain a number of lines of fertile inquiry that could be undertaken to support the development of this dimension of the framework. These include, among others, systematically considering how coaches a) learn emotion rules, b) display anticipated emotions, c) deploy emotions strategically (i.e., to alter the dynamics of a situation in a favourable way), d) manage emotional experience, and e) choose to breach emotion rules (Grills & Prus, 2019).

Interpersonal Skills

This component of the framework is primarily concerned with a leader's capacity to influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others, get buy-in from people who the leader may or may not have direct authority over, and make people feel valued. Here, Hartley (2017) distinguishes between 'tough' and 'soft' skills. The former can include the ability to stand up to pressure from others, to negotiate robustly, and to handle conflict in ways that can support the achievement of constructive outcomes (Hartley, 2017). Meanwhile, the latter entails the purposeful cultivation of relationships (both those with immediate value and those

which have future potential), as well as knowing when to rely on position and authority and when to use less direct methods of exerting influence (Hartley, 2017).

The need for coaches to develop and refine their interpersonal skills has been increasingly highlighted in the literature (e.g., Jones, 2006, 2009; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Potrac et al., 2017). Indeed, the available research suggests that the influence a coach has, and the support they receive (or not), is primarily the product of their (face-to-face) interactions with others. Here, coaches' efforts to implement their coaching approaches and achieve desired outcomes are inextricably tied to the ways in which other stakeholders (e.g., athletes, other coaches, administrators, and parents) variously experience, interpret, and respond to the coach's choices, actions, and manner (Nichol et al.., 2021; Potrac et al., 2017; Purdy, Potrac & Jones, 2008). Rather than being guaranteed, homogenous or fixed in nature, others' evaluations and responsive treatment of a coach have the potential to vary between individuals within a situation, and to change from situation to situation, as well as over time (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Nichol et al., 2021). For us, and others (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Ives et al., 2021), this represents the dynamic, interactive essence of coaching work.

Unfortunately, the attention given to the topics of impression management and interpersonal emotion management in the coaching literature remains sparse. Indeed, both are in need of further conceptual consideration and empirical development (Potrac, 2019). For example, there remains a paucity of inquiry addressing how coaches individually and collectively plan and enact their performances for, and to, different stakeholders, as well as how these performances might change over time or from situation to situation. Relatedly, there has been little systematic consideration of the ways in which various stakeholders make sense of, and respond to, their direct and indirect interactions with coaches. Similarly, we know very little about the ways in which coaches try to influence the emotions experienced

by others (i.e., what emotions, for what duration, when, how and why?). This includes, for example, their efforts to provoke certain emotions (e.g., pride, anger, and guilt) in others or, equally, help others navigate particular emotional episodes. In our minds, these certainly represent pivotal lines of future inquiry that could be utilised to develop and refine this dimension of the framework.

In addition to receiving little explicit attention in coaching research, coaches' interpersonal skills have also received little in the way of systematic consideration in coach education and development provision. In order to redress this situation, we believe that dramaturgical theorising could be productively utilised to support the development of the 'tough' and 'soft' interpersonal skills outlined by Hartley (2017). Dramaturgical inquiry is primarily concerned with examining how, individually and collectively, "people stage performances in real life" (Schulman, 2017, p. 5). Here, the primary focus of this perspective is on the ways in which individuals and groups respectively seek to control their *appearances* (i.e., dress and other features that identify their role, status and condition) and *manner* (i.e., the way in which perform a role – being haughty, meek, enthusiastic or angry), as well as skilfully use *props* (i.e., objects that are used to support a performance) and manage the *staging* of an activity (i.e., the physical layout and background items) to achieve desired ends in their interactions with others (Scott, 2015; Potrac et al., in press). Perhaps most crucially for coach learning, dramaturgical theorising can help us to critically consider how we might use various impression management tactics to influence the thoughts, feelings and (inter)actions of those whom we engage with, be they athletes, other coaches, parents, administrators or other relevant stakeholders (Jones et al., 2004; Schulman, 2017; Potrac et al., in press).

Here, we believe that Goffman's (1959) work addressing the presentation of the self in everyday life provides several concepts that could be used to support the development of

coaches' interpersonal skills. Indeed, for us, the concepts of impression management, front, manner, appearance, and staging, as well as those related to dramaturgical discipline, dramaturgical circumspection, and dramaturgical loyalty, have much to offer educationally. Equally, Goffman's (1959, 1967) examination of micro-level interaction has also revealed a number of strategies that could contribute to coaches' interactive repertoires. These include, for example, those of role distance, social distance, communication out of character, freshness and enthusiasm, and humour as social tools. Similarly, Thoits (1996), Hochschild (1983) and Rafaeli and Sutton (1990, 1991) provided fascinating accounts of the ways in which an individual may seek to positively and productively influence the emotions of others. Among other strategies, these included the use of group supportive acts and comforting techniques (Thoits, 1996). As alluded to earlier, Hochschild (1983) also provides useful insights into the surface acting and deep acting techniques that coaches may utilise in their efforts to influence others, especially as they are connected to displays of situationally expected (and appropriate) emotions.

Reading People and Situations

The primary focus of this dimension is on thinking about, and developing intuition toward, "the dynamics that can occur when stakeholders and agendas come together" (Hartley, 2017, p. 203). For Hartley (2017), this includes identifying the interests of a variety of people and groups, inclusive of their underlying, as well as their espoused, agendas. It also entails thinking through the likely positions, standpoints, and arguments of specific individuals and groups in advance, considering what might happen when people come together, and identifying how such interactions may be productively managed. Finally, this dimension also includes leaders considering how they may be seen to represent a threat to the agendas and interests of others. Importantly, then, the emphasis of this dimension is on the

development of *analytical* skills as they relate to the issues of influence, power, and the different interests of groups.

In recent years, coaching research (e.g., Hall et al., in press; Potrac & Jones, 2009a; Potrac et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2015) has begun to illustrate the micropolitical literacy, or sensemaking, that coaches draw upon in their daily practice. This not only includes their reading of relationships with athletes (Jones et al., 2004), but also those that they simultaneously have with a variety of other situational stakeholders (e.g., other coaches, parents, sponsors, and administrators) (Potrac et al., 2017). For example, Potrac and Jones (2009a) highlighted the way in which a newly appointed head coach read the political landscape of his organisation, inclusive of the vociferous resistance that he received from a senior and highly regarded player. Similarly, Potrac et al. (2013) examined a coach's understanding of the different agendas and goals that his fellow coaches brought to their working relationships. Rather than being characterised by an unproblematic subscription to consensus goals and collaborative ways of working, the findings illustrated the ways in which coaches may consider their colleagues to be 'the competition' and, thus, act in ways to preserve or advance their own interests in an industry characterised by short-term employment contracts and "a constant surplus of talent" (Roderick & Schumaker, 2017, p. 167). Finally, Potrac et al. (2017) provided some initial insights into the ways in which a coach understood the networked nature of stakeholder relationships in his club setting. Indeed, this study illustrated the coach's increasing appreciation of the various interconnections, and sometimes problematic relationships, between particular players, parents, sponsors and club administrators.

Despite the in-roads made by these and other studies (e.g., Gibson & Groom, 2018, 2019; Gomes, Jones, & Batista, 2018; Santos, Jones & Mesquita, 2013), our understanding of the ways in which coaches develop their micropolitical literacy, or ability to read people and

situations, remains embryonic. As such, there is much that we could focus our research efforts on. These could include the rich examination of the critical incidents, people, and phases of time (both inside and outside of sport) that underpin the development of coaches' micropolitical literacy, ethnographic studies of coaches' in-situ readings of the various agendas, priorities, hopes, fears and preferences that comprise their organisational landscapes and, relatedly, the strategies that coaches' formulate to facilitate their relationships with others and, indeed, support productive interactions between different organisational stakeholders (Grills & Prus, 2019; Kelchtermans, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2017).

Notwithstanding the recommendations for future research outlined above, we believe that existing micropolitical frameworks could be utilised to help enrich coach education curricula. For example, the work of Leftwhich (2005) could be used to address the often-held pathological view of politics in sports organisations that coaches (and coach educators) may hold. Indeed, his work highlights how micropolitics are an essential and timeless feature of social life, which exist whenever two or more people engage in any form of collective activity, be it in informal, formal, public or private settings (Leftwhich, 2005). Importantly, he reveals how micropolitics is as much about collaboration and negotiation for the collective good, as it is about the Machiavellian pursuit of self-interests. For us, the introductory insights provided by Leftwhich (2005) could be further developed by fusing this work with the conceptual micropolitical framework offered by Kelchtermans and colleagues (2002a, 2002b, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2017, 2020). Indeed, this scholarship considers the various interests that individuals and groups may wish to individually or collectively pursue, protect, or advance in an organisation. Specifically, these are self-interests, material interests, organisational interests, socio-professional interests, and cultural-ideological interests. In a similar vein, Ball's (1987) classic micropolitical framework could also facilitate learning regarding competing ideologies, the quest for situational jurisdiction, conflict, and skilled,

strategic social action within sporting organisations. Finally, Crossley's (2011) relational theorising could supplement the insights that coaches develop here. In particular, his approach to examining and explaining social life could be used to help coaches identify, map-out, and appreciate the intertwined nature of organisational relationships, ties, and connections, as well the ways in which these relational networks could constrain or enable particular forms of action (Hall et al., in press). Indeed, for us, it has considerable potential to help coaches appreciate how:

> Action is always oriented to other actions and events within the networks in which the actor is embedded. And how the actor responds to these actions and events is influenced by both their impact upon her (sic.) and by the opportunities and constraints afforded her within her networks, networks comprising other actors (Crossley, 2011, p. 3).

Building Alignment and Alliances

This dimension of the framework is concerned with developing alliances with, and building (sufficient) alignment between, individuals and groups who may hold different interests, goals, and motives. Indeed, for Hartley (2017), this component entails a rejection of the popular but overly functional views of collaboration and consensus building in organisations. Instead, it is about forging differences in outlook or emphasis into collaborative action. Importantly, this skill is influenced by the development of the ones outlined in the previous sections. For example, it may entail a) reading people and situations and then proactively seeking out alliances and partnerships rather than relying on others to come to you, b) being able to understand, bring out, and deal with differences between stakeholders rather than concealing them or hoping that they will somehow go away, and c) using tough negotiation skills and exercising self-control to build a realistic and useful consensus between individuals and groups.

For us, the ability to practically generate alignment between, as well as alliances with, different stakeholders represent the beating heart of coaches' work. However, accounts of the ways in which coaches address these issues simultaneously with a range of stakeholders remain largely absent in the coaching literature base (Hall et al., in press; Potrac et al., 2017). Instead, research has tended to focus on the functioning and challenges associated with a particular coaching dyad (e.g., coach-athlete, coach-coach, coach-parent, athlete-athlete). In seeking to redress this issue, Hall et al. (in press) examined the co-construction of situated coaching practice within the complex and interrelated networks of relationships comprising an international rugby team (i.e., between the head coach, their assistants and support staff, the athletes, and a range of other stakeholders). In order to deal with this complexity, the head coach purposefully cultivated differential relations. This entailed privileging some bonds over others, both with, and between, more and less trusted collaborators. For example, by more selectively engaging prominent 'senior' players, the head coach generated 'buy-in', space and time from those best positioned to productively contribute to (or potentially disrupt) her vision and the organisational agendas for which she was ultimately responsible. Whilst doing this, the head coach concurrently sought to generate a sense of collective identity and solidarity among her support staff, such that they supported one another and presented a united front in pursuit of the vision she held for the team. Moreover, she actively distanced herself from some aspects of her formal responsibilities to her employers, the Governing Body, recognising that by choosing not to call upon her legitimate power in certain circumstances (e.g., player discipline, staff control), she would generate favourable returns and reciprocal obligations from her closest allies (e.g., players and assistant coaches) in other situations with more immediate implications for her own interests and the goals of the team.

Despite the generative initial insights provided in Hall et al.'s (in press) study, the ways in which coaches generate, maintain, and, where necessary rebuild alignment or end

alliances with others, remain features of coaching that would significantly benefit from sustained future inquiry. Indeed, alongside the relational perspective employed by Hall et al. (in press), we believe that the theorising of Grills and Prus (2019) and Goffman (1961, 1967) also represent valuable frameworks for guiding both research and the learning of coaches in this topic area. Here, Grills and Prus' (2019) ground-breaking scholarship on 'management and the implementation of collective teams: establishing teams and engaging missions' and 'sustaining team ventures: maintaining focus' are, for us, particularly generative. The former is primarily concerned with the formation, development, and management of teams, which are defined as two or more people coming together and being expected to work towards specific organisational goals. Here, they outline several nuanced issues that coaches might consider in relation to the assembly of teams, generating a sense of 'teamness', deploying team members, and co-ordinating situated activity. The latter addresses some of the central processes and practical activities that coaches may need to undertake. These include the processual challenges of monitoring and assessing team performance, pursuing co-operation, selectively managing and retaining team members, and dealing with departures and dismissals (Grills and Prus, 2019).

In a similar vein, Goffman's (1961, 1967, 1974) concepts related to expression games, uncovering moves, secret monitoring, and fabrications could be used to help coaches consider how they might assess the trustworthiness of others and, relatedly, use these insights to strategically guide their future interactions with specific individuals (as well as the wider network of others that these individuals are connected to). Some important initial insights into this feature of coaches' work were provided by Gale et al. (2019). However, despite their novel contribution to the literature, there is much we might usefully consider in future research. For example, we know very little about a) the strategies that coaches in various contexts use to determine the trustworthiness of the others that they engage with, b) when,

how and why interpersonal (dis)trust may change over time, c) how coaches manage their interactions and relationships with those whom they (dis)trust, and d) how coaches seek to promote trusting relationships between the other individuals and groups that comprise their coaching settings (Gale et al., 2019; Purdy, Potrac & Nelson, 2013) .

Conclusion

In this chapter, we briefly introduced our perspective on the ways in which the political astuteness skills of coaches could potentially be conceptualised, further researched and, indeed, considered in coach education provision. Our efforts to develop this framework should be considered as a 'work in progress' rather than a completed edifice. We, of course, recognise that our collectively shared view is one among many others and, as such, we do not claim it to be the 'only' or 'definitive' way to consider this aspect of coaching. Indeed, we acknowledge that the theoretical stance adopted in this paper reflects both our shared academic orientations, as well as our experiences of coaching at different levels of sport. Ultimately, however, we do believe that the theorising and research presented in this chapter provides a productive way for moving beyond the largely apolitical representations of coaching that have tended to hold sway in much coach education provision. For us, the activity is as much about "people's perspectives, activities, identities, relationships, commitments and participation in a wide range of collective events" as it is about the technical, tactical and bioscientific aspects of sporting performance (Grills & Prus, 2019, p. 178). Indeed, understanding people and working to build sufficient alignment between their activities and interests on a continuous basis is an essential aspect of coaching practice (Grills & Prus, 2019, p. 178). As such, it is important that we continue to investigate and talk about these aspects of coaching in both conceptually precise, informative and impactful terms (Grills & Prus, 2019).

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