Training and Development of Coaches: Application of Reaction Surveys

Gonzalo Bravo, West Virginia University
Doyeon Won, Liverpool John Moores University
Ryan Flett, West Virginia University
Fernando Mezzadri, Universidade Federal do Paraná

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Previous studies in sport human resource management (SHRM) have examined a number of topics including the role of sport volunteers, the psychological contract, and best practices in staffing. One of the areas that has been minimally studied is training and development (T&D) of sport personnel. In the context of service organizations (e.g., banks, universities) as well as manufacturing organizations, T&D plays a critical role within the large part of staffing. T&D involves the organization’s efforts to promote and enhance employees’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes of how to do things at work (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012). T&D is driven from inside the organization in the belief that their impact will bring benefit not only to the employees, but also the customers and the organization as a whole (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). T&D is highly valued and, in most cases, is formally required or enforced not only by the employees’ organization but also by external agencies. Although companies invest billions of dollars in T&D, some estimate that not more than 15% of what is learned in T&D is actually applied to the job (Brinkerhoff, 2006). Understanding the role and value T&D have in sport organizations, specifically among coaches, help us to expand the body of knowledge of sport human resource management (SHRM) but also coaching education. How coaches learn and what matters to them when they attend coaching training programs is critical for governing bodies and sport organizations that conduct these training programs.

Coaching is a unique profession in terms of professional development. Particularly outside of youth scholastic-sports departments and national governing bodies, coaches rarely receive professional development support from the organization that hire them. Coaches face a nearly constant cycle of terminations, rehiring, and promotions as they bounce from team to team, and league to league (Mielke, 2007) with brief retention windows where some form of traditional professional developmental may occur. Drawing from the broad literature on T&D, this study brings a unique perspective on how to examine coaches’ professional development. This study examined coaches’ perceived value and utility of participating in training and professional development seminars. Specifically, this study examined coaches’ reaction to perceived satisfaction with the presenter of the session they attend; the perceived utility of the knowledge learned in the session; and the perceived satisfaction with the setting in which the training session took place.

Participants in this study were coaches who attended the Global Coaches House (GCH) organized by the International Council of Coaching Excellence (ICCE) during the course of the Olympic Games Rio 2016. The GCH was a three-day coaching seminar in which coaches from different sports and level of experience listened experts in a wide array of topics related to coaching. During the nine sessions presented in the three-day seminar, coaches were asked to complete a short 17-item reaction survey per session (Kirkpatrick, 1996) that was administered immediately after the session ended. Because of coaches’ different backgrounds and nationalities, a copy of the survey in two languages, English and Portuguese, was distributed. Items of the survey were adapted from Morgan and Casper (2000). The questionnaire included items pertaining to three areas that assessed the overall degree of satisfaction with the session. These areas were ‘satisfaction with the instructor’ (e.g. knowledge, keep your interest, delivery, responsiveness to audience questions, engagement, overall effectiveness); ‘perceived utility of the session’ (session objective; match expectations, relevancy, utility, novelty); ‘quality of materials and venue’ (handouts, visual aids, equipment, classroom). In addition, there were three demographic questions, six questions related to coaching experience, and four questions about incentives to attend the GCH.

A total of 381 reaction surveys were completed during the three days of training. Total number of coaches who participated was 175 (363 responses with identifiable email addresses and 18 did not indicate identity; we treated 18 responses independently) where each coach completed about two reaction surveys. Thus, from a sample of 175
coaches who responded, 74.5% were male; were 41.3 years old, 52.5% reported as head coaches, and 48.1% indicated that coaching was their primary job. Main reasons to attend (Yes and No) were: ‘learning’ (95.6%), ‘networking’ (57.4%), and ‘obtaining a certification’ (50.7%). Moreover, 59% indicated they self-funded to attend this training and 13.4% were supported by their club/team. Regression analysis showed that the overall quality of the session was explained by ‘quality of session’s material’, ‘presenter’s ability to keep you interested’, ‘presenter’s ability to relate to the audience individually’, ‘presenter’s knowledge of the subject matter’, ‘relevance of the session of the job’, and ‘supplies and equipment used during the session.’ In addition, coaches at the higher level (Olympics, international and professional) were less satisfied with the extent to which this session/course prepared them to perform new coaching/development tasks in comparison to their lower level counterparts (e.g. school and club coaches). While overall most coaches were satisfied and indicated they will recommend this T&D (97.7%) to other coaches and they would return pending on the costs (69.5%), these results showed that coaches were first most satisfied with materials and venues, instructors and then with utility.

Findings from this study shed lights on what matters to coaches when attending a T&D seminar. While reaction surveys do not allow to measure the extent of the learning of coaches it does shed lights on some critical areas where organizers of T&D must put attention like what coaches receive during the session (folder, notes, handouts, other merchandising items) as well as the quality of the presenter (engagement, novelty of the topics). Studies in T&D in the broad area of SHRM are in its infancy. This study represents a first attempt to advance this area.