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Traits Ranked by Track and Field Coaches to Improve Coaching

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Abstract

This study explored traits of characteristics of track and field coaches to promote a better understanding of how to become an effective track and field coach. Findings from the project have the potential to enhance coaching development and improve skills of track and field coaches of various levels. The exploration was inspired by previous studies that suggested characteristics of coaches that were classified as effective, successful, elite, or experts. A quantitative design was utilized in a survey, which was completed by 18 Division III coaches in the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Conference. Participants included assistant coaches, head coaches, and various event coaches (i.e. sprints, jumps, throws, etc.) determined by demographic information that was collected for assessment. Participants ranked a list of traits for six characteristics from most important to least important. Comparisons were made among the rankings of each trait to learn coaches' perceptions of the most beneficial traits. The most important trait for each characteristic was analyzed collectively, and determined by examining the mode of participants' rankings. There were no discernible associations found between how traits were ranked and any of the demographic information collected. The results of this study suggest quality of practices, level of trust, intrinsic motivation, hard work, life skills, and coaching experience are the most significant traits for a coach to reflect upon to enhance their development. The project also provides track and field coaches seeking to improve their coaching skills with characteristics of effective coaches.

Chapter One

Introduction

As a coach in track and field for close to a decade I am always looking for ways in which I can improve my athletes. Through my own experiences that include undergraduate and postgraduate courses, certification programs, mentors, and observations I came to the conclusion that in order to develop athletes, I need to improve as a coach. I wanted to reach a certain level of personal achievement by becoming a collegiate track and field coach and if I was lucky enough to coach an elite athlete that would simply be a plus. I quickly learned that coaches all have their unique abilities to develop athletes and there is no one correct answer that allows every athlete to achieve some level of success. I also discovered that I could not use another coach's plan and implement it in order to be effective. I needed to become a unique coach based upon my personality and my personal goals set for myself and my athletes. This is where the idea of researching characteristics of effective track and field coaches spawned. My intentions were to focus on what characteristics were shared between effective coaches that represented the level I wanted to achieve as a coach. As a result, this project entitled "Traits Ranked by Track and Field Coaches to Improve Coaching" may become a continuing education guide for coaches and one that I see as useful in athletics, particularly to track and field coaches, as it emphasizes how to enhance the development of a coach and hopefully leads to athletic improvement.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to provide guidelines by obtaining developmental profiles and personal perceptions and opinions from track and field coaches to help other coaches enhance their philosophy and improve their coaching skills given that there has been a lack of literature on coaching development (Collins, Gould, Lauer, & Chung, 2009). Additionally, I

discovered that there was a lack of sport-specific research in track and field. A number of studies discussed effective coaching strategies, characteristics of coaches, development of effective coaches, and how to become a successful coach (Collins et al., 2009; Frost, 2009; Gilbert, Côté, & Mallet, 2010; Gilbert, Lichtenwaldt, Gilbert, Zelezny, & Côté, 2009; Nash, Sproule, Callan, McDonald, & Cassidy, 2009). However, there were several variables that were unrelated to track and field or this particular study for instance, some studies examined multiple sports or compared individual and team sports while other research explored coaches of elite athletes (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003; Lynch & Mallet, 2006; Trninić, Papić, & Trninić, 2009). Effective coaches were identified as those holding a track and field coaching position at a respected and highly competitive track and field program from regionally based institutions at the time of this study. It was through their lens that I sought to determine the most important traits to enhance coaching development and improve coaching skills.

Nature of the Study

The profiles, perceptions, and opinions gathered from 18 coaches in this study focus on coaching characteristics that they perceived as important qualities that make coaches effective. These characteristics may also provide a positive influence on performances by athletes. Numerical data was collected between January and February 2013 by way of an online survey that was sent to potential participants. I designed the survey based upon the same criteria from Frost's (2009) study. It was expected that the data revealed the most important traits per each characteristic of effective coaches with the possibility of comparisons between coach's profiles. The results were analyzed by comparing the average rating of each trait. The number of participants that ranked a particular trait as most important was also examined.

Significance of the Study

The results obtained from the survey in this research suggest that all traits are important regardless of ranking. Despite certain traits perceived as more valuable than others, each plays an important role in coaching development and coaches should reflect on all of them to improve as they are all significant. Some of the traits may overlap and be a by-product of two different characteristics, so even though a trait is listed for one characteristic it does not mean it is exclusive to only that trait. Also, while some traits were easy to identify as most or least important, others were not as easy to determine. Some traits had a narrow margin between averages, so the deciding factor was the number of participants that ranked a trait as most important and vice versa. Finally, the results provide a foundation for what track and field coaches could emphasize to improve coaching skills. Current and future track and field coaches can direct their efforts toward creating a model that aids in developing and strengthening their coaching development and improving their ability.

A review of literature recognizes traits of effective coaches that will help enhance the qualities and abilities of coaches regardless of the sport and level of competition. The research performed within this project was designed to narrow down important traits among characteristics of track and field coaches to identify specific qualities that are associated with coaching development.

Summary

As I worked to improve my personal level of achievement I came to the conclusion that I need to continuously grow as a coach and develop my coaching skills. Throughout this process I discovered a number of studies that are evident in order to reach my goal. This research may also help other coaches with similar goals or those looking to positively influence the performances of their athletes. The purpose of this project is to inform and guide track and field coaches by

identifying characteristics of effective track and field coaches from the literature review and research conducted.

Coaching characteristics from various sports and levels of competition are specified in chapter two for the purpose of identifying possible characteristics of effective track and field coaches that are analyzed in this study and possible future studies. Chapter two also presents the profiles of coaches that support the effectiveness of their coaching ability. The outcome reveals a variety of characteristics amongst coaches that have assisted in developing their coaching method and impacted their personal success as well as the success of their athletes. These characteristics include practice management, communication, motivation, athlete development, and knowledge.

Chapter three will describe a research study that was conducted and designed to provide information on the characteristics of effective track and field coaches. The study will help guide new and current track and field coaches to create and develop their coaching method. Research results and analysis will be discussed in chapter four. The overall assessment of the project including recommendations and limitations of the research are reported in chapter five.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

In the early 1990's the job of a coach was to develop athletes with the underlying focus on assisting athletes achieve a certain level of performance. This idea was demonstrated by Woodman (1993) and Douge and Hastie (1993) which examined the expanded growth of coaching and sports performance over the previous 20 and 5 years, respectively, from their research date. Woodman (1993) explains that "coaches must be able to implement, evaluate, and modify training programs for effective development of the athlete" (p. 3) while Douge and Hastie (1993) share a similar description that a coach needs to have the "ability to observe, analyze, synthesize, and modify his or her coaching to fit the situation and the needs of those involved" (p. 14). Over time, the theory and methodology of coaching has developed and by mid-2000 the job of a coach was transformed to teaching athletes sport skills regardless of level of competition (Gearity, 2012; NASPE 2006). The idea of achieving a particular performance level was no longer the focal point, as the focus was directed towards teaching and improving various skill sets despite the skill level. This was supported by the various teaching and coaching methods that were being utilized based upon the sport and skill level of athletes (Hoogestraat, Phillips, & Rosemond, 2014). Despite this knowledge, Hoogestraat et al. (2014) still expressed "growing concern that coaches are being inadequately prepared to coach" (para. 31). Williams and Kendall (2007) shared a similar view as they proclaimed that recent research suggests that there needs to be more research into the practice of effective coaches and the integration of sport science findings. If coaches had access to all coaching related information that existed, there would likely be a major improvement in athletic performances (Woodman, 1993). It is from these perspectives that characteristics of effective coaches should be identified in order to

facilitate the professional development of coaches.

Information regarding effective coaching is no longer emphasized solely on developing athletes. Effective coaches display characteristics that demonstrate a commitment to their coaching in addition to their athletes (Nash et al., 2009). Specifically, "this commitment has been shown to be an integral component within effective coaching as shown by Côté et al's Coaching Model" (p. 130). Furthermore, effective coaches are good teachers (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010) with the innate ability to identify the proper characteristics for coaching their respective sport which is also imperative to a coach's development. In this literature review, available evidence on the characteristics of effective coaches is summarized and those that represent the most important characteristics are discussed as they may be significantly useful for professional development in coaching.

Characteristics of Effective Coaches

To fully understand the benefit of identifying characteristics of effective coaches, it is important to recognize the meaning of "effective", that is, what constitutes effective coaching. It is difficult to define effective coaching because "historically there has been less consensus on how to define effective sport coaching" (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010, p. 87), but as demonstrated in research by Douge and Hastie (1993), "effective coaching may be described as a coach's ability to react to the characteristics and needs of players" (p. 18). Additionally, with the primary focus no longer on the athletes and instead on coaches and athletes, there still remains "a lack of precision in terminology and approach, and a singular failure to relate effectiveness to any conceptual understanding of the coaching process" (Lyle, 2002, p. 251). For example, some researchers define effective coaching by the win-lose record, or by athletes' level of achievement, or athletes' personal attributes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). A prime example of this is

evident as many different labels have been used to describe effective coaching, including successful, model, elite, expert, winning, championship, quality, experienced, great, outstanding, and high performance (Collins et al., 2009; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010; Lynch & Mallet, 2006). Although these types of studies are particularly valuable to the development of coaches and the expansion of sport science the "progress as a field will continue to be limited until we can clearly articulate a shared conceptual understanding of coaching effectiveness" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 308).

In an attempt to establish a distinct definition of the term "effective" Côté and Gilbert (2009) explored an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness (and expertise) which revealed a proposed definition with clarification of common terminology. Their results show that the proposed definition of coaching effectiveness is "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (p. 316). However, it is important to note that the researchers formed a clear distinction between coaching effectiveness and effective coaching in order to be more precise and conceptually grounded in the coaching literature. Thus, they defined effective coaches as "those who demonstrate the ability to apply and align their coaching expertise to particular athletes and situations in order to maximize athlete learning outcomes" (p. 316). Nash et al. (2009) expressed a similar definition of the term "effective" as "those who adapt their behavior to meet the demands of their particular coaching environment" (p. 121). The concept of "effective" coaching may continue to be unclear, but the proposed definitions may help create connections among studies and provide some conceptual clarity. Regardless of how "effective" is portrayed careful reflection on one's practice is critical to achieving that standard of coaching (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010) in spite of the

level at which one coaches.

The benefit of identifying characteristics of effective coaches could offer coaches help in improving their ability and assist those with the ambition of becoming an effective coach achieve their goal. Frost (2009) discusses characteristics that contribute to the success of a coach and posed the question, "why is it important to identify characteristics of successful coaches?" (p. 1). He discovered that one reason people coach is to help athletes, and concluded that coaches would use the exact characteristics that promoted athletes' achievement. Frost determined that "acquiring skills and knowledge would allow the coach to be part of a beneficial transfer of information to the athlete, assisting in the success of each" (p.1). According to Frost's (2009) research, there are 17 such characteristics including high school education, college education, and certification, athletic experience in high school and in college, coaching experience in primary sport and in other sports, numerous coaching achievements, and strong win-loss record. Also among the 17 characteristics were a variety of skills for instance, quality of practice, scheduling/care of facilities, event management, communicating with athletes, motivating athletes, developing athletes' sports skills, possessing knowledge of one's sport, and organizational skills. A total of 15 high school coaches rated these 17 characteristics on a scale from 1(least important) to 5 (most important) and the results showed that 5 of them were ranked above the 90th percentile. The top five were quality of practice, communicating with athletes, motivating athletes, developing athletes' sport skills, and possessing knowledge of the sport. McCloskey (1999) discussed similar methods a competent coach should employ such as, developing athletes' skills, motivating athletes, and communicating with athletes all of which can greatly improve a coach's ability. From sport to sport, these characteristics may not be defined the same, but since they consist of essentially the same process there are some similarities that

exist (Frost, 2009). Ultimately, "an example of these similarities appears in a series of books published by the American Sport Education Program, a division of Human Kinetics publishing of Champaign, Illinois. The books, while sport-specific, share a common emphasis on the importance of fundamental coaching skills: communication, motivation, practice planning, and developing and evaluating athletes" (p. 1).

There have been numerous studies conducted that have revealed similar results using the related terms. Lynch and Mallet (2006) examined how to become a successful track and field coach by way of studying how coaches developed knowledge and skills, and the significant influences of that development. What their results showed was that successful coaches participated in track and field as a youth and as young adults, they had extensive experience with direct coaching and engagement with mentors, and some coach training. In a similar study, Nash et al. (2009) investigated the processes involved in the development of expertise, from the perspectives of expert coaches. The results from this study confirmed that of Lynch and Mallet (2006) as each coach demonstrated early sport involvement, attributed their knowledge to their own experiences and observations with experienced coaches, and encounters with mentors, and coaching education courses to some degree as expert coaches did not value formal coaching clinics. Additional research on ways to enhance coaching knowledge found that expert coaches acquired knowledge in a variety of methods, including attending coaching clinics and seminars, reading books, networking, observing other coaches and mentoring.

First, coaches need more than technical knowledge of their sport. They need to be familiar with and better understand learning theories, self-reflection, motivational tactics and knowledge construction (Nash et al., 2009). There are various instructional methods that coaches can seek out in order to teach athletes the technical, tactical, and mental skills of a sport. Coaches

also impact the 'character' of their athletes. They need to be aware and take responsibility for teaching proper morals. Coaches are expected to not only know these skills, but also communicate and teach these skills to athletes. Elite or expert coaches are purported to be extremely knowledgeable of these skills and masters of teaching these skills to athletes (Gearity, 2012). However, due to the increasing concern that **coaches** are not prepared sufficiently enough, **coaches** need to refocus on the fundamentals of coaching by focusing first and foremost on themselves. **Coaches** need to understand that their profession has changed and they must adjust in order to be successful. Change is vital for a coach and, in dealing with change, it is necessary for **coaches** to foster the change (or growth) process. For instance, what often happens to **coaches** who are not educating themselves (by attending workshops, coaching clinics, webinars, or reading articles and books, etc.) is that they become stagnant and lose their competitive edge on how to work with **athletes**.

Coaches must examine themselves in five distinct areas based on a study performed by Frost (2009). Out of 17 possible characteristics of successful coaches, 5 were ranked above all the rest by coaches from various competition levels as well as sports. These characteristics included quality of practice, communication, motivation, skill development, and knowledge. Other studies also supported the importance of some of the characteristics discovered by Frost (2009). Hoogestraat et al. (2014) expressed the need for coaches to examine themselves in the area of motivation and communication as these were identified as two critically important topics for coaches. Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, and Gallimore (2010) stated the significance of learning how to coach effectively since "effective coaches understand that they cannot improve by themselves" (p. 90). Collins, Gould, Lauer, and Chung (2009) examined the objectives and beliefs of outstanding coaches which revealed coaches place a primary importance on athletic

development. Each of the five ranked characteristics is discussed further in this chapter, in no

particular order, as all of them are proven to be important aspects of the coaching profession.

Practice Management

Coaches have invested a great deal of time and energy into the preparation of their

athletes by being committed to providing them with high-quality training programs (Nash et al.,

2009). Identifying fundamentals within these practice sessions is very important in coaching

development. According to Nash et al. (2009), training sessions are planned and implemented in

regards to the elements of competition making practices both relevant and intense. Thus, the

insistence on the quality plays a major role in coaching development. This statement is consistent

with the findings of Gearity (2012) who claimed the quality of coach's instruction is significant,

"athletes' perceptions of the quality of instruction is likely to be equally, if not more important

than the mere frequency and quantity of instruction" (p. 91). He recommended that coaches be

"knowledgeable of the technical, tactical, and mental skills of their sport, and also how to

facilitate athletes' learning" since useless or insubstantial instruction is ineffective to athlete

performances (p. 91). The timing at which athletes receive instruction from coaches also plays a

role in the quality of the training session. Based on perceptions of athletes, coaches are unaware

when the timing of their instruction is poor and inappropriate. It is perceived by athletes that the

only time they received instruction was when their performance was down.

Coincidentally, Gearity (2012) identified technical instruction as a contributing factor to

coaching development as it provides a positive sport experience for athletes. Athletes that gained

no positive experience described coaches that provided simplistic or inadequate instruction as

poor teachers. As described by Gearity (2012), poor teaching is directly related to sport

performance (mental, tactical, and technical skills) as well as other life lessons. Plus, athletes

viewed coaches as possessing a lack of knowledge about the technical and tactical skills, as

mentioned above, and also the inability to empathize with athletes. However, in order to be

considered unknowledgeable more than not knowing one or two aspects of the sport was

required, being perceived as ignorant was also a feature. The most common responses behind

athletes' lack of positive experience were described as their coach being too old and failing to

adjust with the times as well as lack of playing experience. In a different study by Jones,

Bezodis, and Thompson (2009) a similar result was revealed, successful track and field coaches

are aware of technical concepts within their event. Coach's technical knowledge and ability to

specify proper techniques are critical components of performing an activity effectively for

instance, quality sprinting, during training sessions. In spite of the importance of instruction

"instruction in itself is not enough" (Gearity, 2012, p. 92).

Communication

An equally important topic for all **coaches** to develop is effective communication. It is

vital that coaches know the correct words to use that will most simply communicate the message

(instructions or feedback) so athletes can understand and execute. It is also important that based

on given instructions or feedback athletes can execute a plan otherwise the message is lost due to

various reasons such as, overabundance of words. The idea behind "less is more" with regards to

communication applies well to coaching (Hoogestraat et al., 2014).

One critically important topic for coaches identified by Hoogestraat et al. (2014) is

communication. The topic matches well with the fifth domain of the NASPE National Coaching

Standards: Teaching and Communication (and the respective standards: 23: Clear Instruction and

25: Communication). The study by Hoogestraat et al. (2014) splits communication into two

parts, nonverbal and verbal. Nonverbal which includes body motion, physical characteristics,

touching behavior, voice characteristics, and body position makes up 70% of communication by coaches and those that neglect these nonverbal cues can easily miss numerous opportunities for positive messages to their athletes. Coaches tend to exhibit greater control over their verbal messages than they do their nonverbal, but it is still important to be aware of implications of verbal cues. For instance, recognize surroundings as there is a wide range of people and audiences listening when a coach speaks. Coaches need to realize what words are actually being used and be able to restrain from words that create negative possibilities and uncertainties, or misunderstandings. Finally, the observation and evaluation of athletes' responses to the words of the coach are as important as the delivery of the message (Hoogestraat et al, 2014).

Similar to the previous characteristic (practice management), athletes perceive their coach as a poor teacher by "not individualizing their teaching to correspond with the unique needs of each athlete" (Gearity, 2012, p. 87). The poor teaching by coaches is evident when coaches use the same communication to instruct and motivate all athletes. Consequently, athletes feel neglected when coaches use the same words. Athletes become less receptive and lose respect for their coach through constant negative or demeaning communication, for example, unhelpful instruction and ineffectual feedback (Becker, 2009; d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois 1998; Gearity, 2012; Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003; Potrac, Jones, & Armour, 2002).

In order for coaches to maintain respect of their athletes at least eight complications of communication need to be avoided: lack of credibility, negative communicator, apt to evaluate and blame rather than to teach and instruct, inconsistent behavior, talk but will not listen, show no emotion and lack effective nonverbal communication, inability to explain concepts or instructions, and incapable of utilizing reinforcement in teach and coaching (Hoogestraat et al., 2014). Nevertheless, if conflict is unavoidable research indicates that communication is

imperative in order to resolve conflicts (Zimmerman & Herzog, 2009). A breakdown in

communication causes problems to be unidentifiable and, therefore, inhibits solutions from being

recognized. Conflict resolution requires discussion with a two-way conversation (Holt & Molloy,

2009; Zimmerman & Herzog, 2009). Compared to the research about negative connotations,

instead of avoiding situations, other findings demonstrate that "coaches trained in providing

positive feedback, technical instruction, and reducing the use of punitive actions are more likely

to increase athletes' self-esteem and contribute to a positive sport experience" (Gearity, 2012, p.

80).

Motivation

There are countless ways to motivate athletes, yet results by Hoogestraat et al. (2014)

revealed that one topic that coaches wished they would have known more about is motivation.

The reasoning stems from the inability to treat each athlete the same as every athlete is motivated

differently depending upon their personality. What works for one athlete does not always work

for another. Thus, motivation is another aspect that is critical to coaching development

(Hoogestraat et al., 2014). However, prior to motivating athletes a few steps must be met and

understood.

First, coaches need to develop relationships with athletes. Figuring out the many

personalities of athletes in addition to discovering their likes and dislikes are critical pieces in

doing so. Coach Mike Krzyzewski, Head Men's Basketball Coach at Duke University, said it

best in his book Leading with the Heart, "The main job of a coach is to motivate, the main job of

a leader is to inspire" (Hoogestraat et al., 2014, p. 22). It is essential that coaches motivate

athletes. The pivotal part is to build relationships so that coaches know their athletes. As a result,

coaches will have a clearer understanding of how to motivate them (Hoogestraat et al., 2014).

Secondly, coaches need to take time to better understand how athletes are motivated. Recall, athletes are not inspired the same way, however similar, coaches need to motivate each athlete individually as most athletes don't come perfectly motivated. Contrary to some research, some coaches believe that athletes should be able to motivate themselves. For example, former Head Football Coach at the University of Notre Dame, Lou Holtz once stated, "It's not my job to motivate my **athletes**. They should come to the program already motivated. It's my job to **make** sure I don't de-motivate them" (Hoogestraat et al., 2014, p. 22). Coaching success emphasizes "self-improvement rather than measuring oneself against the performances of others" (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010, p. 86). Other research supports this, for example, in achievement motivation literature by Horn (2008) the internal focus on personal development is referred to as task- or mastery-orientation.

Finally, coaches need to use praise and reinforcement while meeting basic needs of athletes. Two theories are the key components to this final step. Behaviorism Theory concludes "that all people want to be praised and need their actions reinforced" (Hoogestraat et al., 2014, p. 28). Praise and reinforcement should be used wisely and delivered with full sincerity. Details should be specific and constructive. Research on expert coaches suggests that a combination of praise and instruction plays an important role in motivating athletes to learn motor and tactical skills (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Portrac et al., 2002) as it provides athletes with information about performance and identity. Additionally, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs claims "that every man must have his basic needs met first before being motivated to do something he otherwise might not do" (Hoogestraat et al., 2014, p. 28). In research by Gearity (2012), he "reveals the importance of creating a fun, positive, and serious learning environment" (p. 91, Becker, 2009; Jones et al., 2003) in order to achieve such needs of athletes allowing them to be

more motivated.

Athlete Development

Much research in sport pedagogy and coaching science tends to be natural science-based (e.g. physiology, biomechanics), however studies have shown the influence coaches have on the physical growth and development, social environment, and the psychological and subjective well-being of their athletes (Felton & Jowett, 2013; Gearity, 2012). Therefore, coaches need to be aware of the physical, psychological, and social effects of what and how morals, values, and decision-making affect athletes both positively and negatively.

Trninić, Papić, and Trninić (2009) argued that "Planning, programming and execution of training must be based on the laws of athlete's total potential and total efficacy development in a particular sport" (p. 104). They argue this because within sports preparation all relevant variables of a particular sport need to be improved in addition to encouragement among specific adaptations. Trninić et al. (2009) identified three common characteristics of coaches which assisted them in molding their athletes. The first characteristic stated that coaches enjoyed coaching and encouraged athletes to perform to the best of their ability. The second characteristic explained that coaches created an ideal learning environment. The third characteristic of these coaches was their ability to understand athletes' needs. Similarly in a study by Gearity (2012), he acknowledged additional characteristics that "suggests effective coaches plan for practice diligently and meticulously and focus on developing positive psychological characteristics of athletes such as self-confidence and motivation" (p. 80). Overall, the role of expert coaches "refers to the qualities of decision-making, ability to transfer knowledge in the process of learning and training, in interventions when guiding individuals, in managing the sports preparation process, and in the strategy of reaching programmed set goals" (Trninić et al., 2009,

p. 104).

Contrary to positive influences, negative influences such as, "inappropriate lifestyles, can cause big talents to become ″eternal″ talents" (Trninić et al., 2009, p. 104). This is similar to how an inadequate relationship can negatively impact the coach-athlete relationship (Trninić et al., 2009). Behaviors which are normally portrayed as unacceptable (i.e. excessive alcohol consumption, physical and verbal abuse) need to be avoided whereas proper decision-making as well as instruction regarding life skills needs to be taught (Gearity, 2012).

Knowledge

Another core element of effective coaching is knowledge which includes both pedagogical and subject (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010). It is important to identify what coaches do to promote athletic development, but contrary to a report by Gilbert, Côté, and Mallett (2010) that suggests little research has been performed on educational and professional experiences that lead to expertise, there have been a number of researches on ways to enhance coaching knowledge. For instance, "studies revealed that expert coaches acquired knowledge in a variety of methods, including attending coaching clinics and seminars, reading books, networking, observing other coaches, and mentoring" (Nash et al., 2009, p. 134). In addition, Nash et al. (2009) found that experience is a very important element as it allows coaches to become aware and understand their coaching method and develop knowledge through an authentic learning environment. This claim is supported by research that shows successful coaches accumulate thousands of hours of "pre-coaching" experience while competing as an athlete (Nash et al., 2009). Nash et al. (2009) also concluded that expert coaches expressed a need for more formalized mentoring programs to allow opportunities for coaches to gain hands-on experience and observe mentors more thoroughly. Similarly, Lynch and Mallet (2006)

support these claims from Nash et al. (2009) as they discovered that successful track and field

coaches developed by engaging in sport activities as adolescents, coach training, and coaching

activities for instance, direct coaching and mentors.

Woodman (1993) argues that a key to quality coaching is coaching education. Dickson

(2001) and Nash et al. (2009) reported similar conclusions, but both noted that coaching courses

do not provide specific information in order to learn how to become a high performance coach or

meet the needs of elite level athletes. A number of coaches deem such programs as unimportant

due to limited practical value, appropriateness, and inconsistent quality (Irwin, Hanton, &

Kerwin, 2004; Jones et al., 2003; Nash et al., 2009). Textbooks, manuals, and seminars are

claimed to be of the least vital sources of information (Gould, Krane, Giannini, & Hodge, 1990;

Irwin et al., 2004). In spite of this evidence, formal learning is beneficial in constructing

coaching knowledge in the early stages of development as in initiates enthusiasm and interest

while also providing vocational opportunities and advancement (Dickson, 2001; Irwin et al.,

2004; Lynch & Mallet, 2006). Since conventional training can be considered significant in

learning, it can be said that application and development of knowledge within the field are of

greater importance as it provides a more authentic learning environment (Lynch & Mallet, 2006).

Experiences gained over time are invaluable to coaching knowledge and beneficial to

development. Personal experiences, interactions with other coaches, and experiences as an

athlete are all important sources of knowledge and practice (Lynch & Mallet, 2006).

Additionally, empirical learning has been identified as another source of knowledge in the

development of expertise (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003; Lyle, 2002) as well as experiences

and mentors (Jones et al., 2003). Salmela and Moraes (1996) support this claim as they

discovered that one of the most important knowledge sources was the observation of other

coaches. The impact of coaching experience greatly effects the development of coaching knowledge and subsequent practice (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003). However, experience in coaching or ability as an athlete may not be a prerequisite to become a successful coach (Lynch & Mallet, 2006).

Essentially, "effective coaches understand that they cannot improve by themselves" (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010, p. 90) so learning how to effectively coach is perpetuated by learning various areas within the sport from the help of others such as, coaching peers (Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel, 2009). They also understand regardless of how long one coaches and how many courses and other materials are consumed, there will be challenges for which knowledge and experience alone are insufficient preparation (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, 2010).

Summary

Coaching effectiveness has been identified by a number of ways and defined by various terms for example, psychosocial outcomes (e.g. increased self-esteem or motivation), competition outcome (Horn, 2008), and maximizing athletes' satisfaction (Gearity, 2012). Coaches that are portrayed as effective display characteristics that demonstrate a commitment to their coaching in addition to their athletes (Nash et al., 2009). Effective coaches are aware and understand that their job is not only about athlete performances, rather it's about helping athletes improve their performance by developing sport skills regardless of the level of competition (Gearity, 2012; NASPE 2006).

Frost (2009) revealed five characteristics (practice management, communication, motivation, athlete development, and knowledge) that contribute to the success of a coach. Additional research has supported Frost's (2009) findings by revealing important traits among

each characteristic. For example, the quality of a practice can affect the performance of an athlete if the training is not conducive to the athlete, practice may not be fun, or the learning environment is not ideal (Gearity, 2012; Nash et al., 2009; Trninić et al., 2009). Furthermore, poor communication whether it stems from the delivery of a message (Hoogestraat et al., 2014, NAPSE, 2006), lack of credibility, or inability to instruct or resolve problems (Holt & Molloy, 2009; Hoogestraat et al., 2014; Zimmerman & Herzog, 2009), negative communication, lack of evaluation, or little teaching (Hoogestraat et al., 2014) limits athletic development by creating a negative sports experience (Gearity, 2012; Jones et al., 2009). The effects of a negative sports experience may produce an unhealthy relationship between the coach and athlete (Gearity, 2012; Trninić et al., 2009). Consequently, athletes become unmotivated due to the bad relationship because the coach is not committed to better understand how athletes are motivated and does not provide praise or reinforcement (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Hoogestraat et al., 2014; Potrac et al., 2002).

The inability to perform as an athlete may be detrimental to the development of physical, psychological, or social skills (Felton & Jowett, 2013; Gearity, 2012). Coaches need to be able to understand and meet the needs of each athlete to establish an appropriate training session that is fun, positive, and provides a serious learning environment (Becker, 2009; Gearity, 2012; Jones et al., 2003; Trninić et al., 2009). Consequently, athletes will be motivated to learn motor and tactical skills that will lead them to improved performances (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Potrac et al., 2002). Effective coaches have the ability to adapt their behavior to meet the demands of their athletes and coaching environment (Nash et al., 2009). However, due to the lack of guidance on how to enhance coaching skills there is a greater need for research (Nash et al., 2009). The literature provided specific characteristics that could potentially help improve the abilities of

coaches and assist with achieving the status of an effective coach. As Frost (2009) states,

"acquiring skills and knowledge would allow the coach to be part of a beneficial transfer of

information to the athlete, assisting in the success of each" (p.1). The following chapter describes

a research design on the characteristics of effective track and field coaches that will help guide

new and current track and field coaches create and develop their coaching method.

Chapter Three

Method

Within the literature review, there were a number of common characteristics that were discovered among effective coaches. These characteristics were included in the survey methodology design for this project and while some may not be as important depending on the level of competition, all characteristics are significant in coaching development.

The literature review has indicated a widespread desire to improve coaching skills by incorporating various characteristics within coaching methods, yet few studies to date (Collins et al., 2009) have ranked particular traits per each characteristic. The method utilized in this project was from a survey that was distributed electronically using an online survey tool, Survey Monkey, to various track and field coaches from a single conference in the Midwest. The survey was conducted in January and February of 2013 and the survey results were analyzed in August and September of 2014. Participants ranked a set of traits within each characteristic from most important to least important. The data presented numerical information to garner a ranking of participants' perceptions of the important of traits within each characteristic.

This chapter reviews the steps that were performed in order to complete this study. It begins with the research design and how the survey was created. The next section pertains to the subjects that participated, followed by procedures of surveying those subjects, and concludes with the implementation and compilation of the data.

Research Design

The main question of the survey was to discover what traits effective track and field coaches felt were the most important in order to develop and strengthen coaching skills. To address these questions, I designed a survey that consisted of 15 items. There were nine items

that gathered demographic information about the participants, which were used to construct a developmental profile of the respondents to the survey. The developmental profile provided information about the respondents from their experience as a coach and as an athlete. For example, the development profile developed for experience as a coach was ascertained through objective questions the respondents answered indicating the number of seasons they coached track and field, the number of seasons they coached track and field in the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Conference (WIAC) specifically, the event(s) coached, the highest level of coaching education, annual hours of coaching education received, certifications received, and coaching awards received. For the developmental profile as an athlete, respondents answered questions about the level they participated in as an athlete and any athletic awards they received. While this information was similar to what was included in Frost's study in terms of gathering information about education, experience and coaching achievements, in my study these items were used to ascertain demographic information about the participants, as opposed to asking them to rate the level of importance as in Frost's study.

The remaining eight items were developed from five characteristics reported by Frost (2009). The six characteristics I included provided a frame for gathering information about *Practices, Communication, Motivation, Athlete development – Physical, Athlete development – Psycho/social*, and *Knowledge*. Frost's participants rated five of these characteristics above 90%; however, I chose to separate out the development characteristic into physical and psycho-social dimensions. It is important to note that in Frost's study, participants rated the importance of each characteristic individually. The characteristics were not rated against each other, that is, all characteristics could have received a score of 5 indicating that the respondent considered each characteristic had an equally high level of importance. Instead, in my study, I used Frost's top

characteristics as a framework for the survey, and added a list of the traits that corresponded to each characteristic. Participants then rated the traits within each characteristic, against the other traits in the same category. The results of my study add to the information obtained in Frost's study in that they provide additional insight into what specific attributes are valued as most important for each characteristic.

It is important to reiterate that participants ranked the factors listed under each characteristic individually, against the other factors listed within that category. For example, participants used a unique number (from 1 through 6) to rate the following factors that influence *Practices* from most important (1) to least important (6): content of practices, duration of practice sessions, efficiency of practices, frequency of practices per week, quality of practices, and quantity of practices per season. In *Communication*, the factors that were rated from 1 to 7 included: the importance of instruction, clarity of message, delivery of message, giving feedback, level of trust, receiving feedback, and recruitment. Elements for *Motivation* were: build strengths, extrinsic motivation, individual goal setting, intrinsic motivation, overcome weaknesses, reach full potential, and team goal setting. Similarly, participants rated motivational factors from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). Aspects ranked 1 through 5 within *Athlete development – Physical* were: critique/recommendations, fun, hard work, preparation, and winning/awards. Featured among those ranked 1 through 5 in *Athlete development – Psycho/social* were: age appropriate of skill advancement, athletes view as special, life skills, sportsmanship/behavior, and event readiness. The 1 through 5 ranked factors in the last trait, *Knowledge*, were: athletic experience, coaching experience, continuing education, time management, and use of technology. For all of the rankings, 1 indicated the most important, while the largest number indicated the least important.

Participants

The research study was limited to Division III track and field coaches from the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC), as opposed to studying coaches from any division of any sport from any region. Although coaches from any sport of any region could have been selected for the present study, track and field coaches from the WIAC were selected based on my familiarity and access to these coaches. Potential participants were contacted and offered the opportunity to participate in the study. There were a total of 51 surveys that were sent to possible participants with 18 recorded respondents resulting in a 35% response rate.

Procedures

The idea behind this study was initiated from my experiences as a track and field coach. In the summer of 2011, I selected a topic related to coaching and began researching different aspects that I felt would be beneficial to improving coaches. After conducting some research I decided to focus on certain characteristics of coaches, more specifically effective track and field coaches, since most studies suggested particular coaching strategies to improve abilities of athletes. Further research was conducted to determine if there was evidence that supported the claim that athletic coaches possessed certain qualities, and additionally which specific traits, if any, were found amongst effective coaches. Due to the vast amount of traits uncovered in the literature, I decided that a survey was needed, informed by previous research in order to organize traits under the proper characteristic.

In the spring of 2012 my survey (Appendix B) was created based upon a survey used by Frost (2009). I also identified possible participants, decided how to distribute the survey, and acquired permission to administer the survey. Each characteristic identified in my survey was deemed as essential to contributing to the success of a sports coach by Frost in his 2009 study.

After the development of a literature review, common traits were recognized and were assigned to an appropriate characteristic in which participants had to rank the sub-qualities from most important to least important. In order for the collected information to be beneficial, the survey was created to collect quantitative data. A form of demographic questions was asked by means of a developmental profile to identify any noticeable trends that occurred such as number of seasons coached and event(s) coached. This eliminated the chance of only surveying very experienced or novice coaches, or specific event coaches.

In the winter of 2012-13 the survey was issued electronically via email using the internet survey tool, Survey Monkey. Electronic method was used in this study due to convenience of collecting and analyzing the data.

Implementation

As there was only one survey constructed, the implementation consisted solely of administering surveys to track and field coaches. The idea behind the survey was to gain a sense as to which traits coaches felt were more important than others when it came to certain pre-determined characteristics. Each characteristic as well as each trait were discussed previously in this chapter. Surveys were distributed electronically via email through an internet link to Survey Monkey where subjects were asked to participate in a graduate research project pertaining to track and field coaches by completing a survey (Appendix A). By fulfilling all portions of the survey, each participant acknowledged that all information submitted would be used for research purposes only and each individual respondent survey would be kept confidential. Participation in this survey was voluntary and subjects had the ability to opt out at any given time.

As previously stated, Division III track and field coaches from the WIAC were chosen as possible participants. Nine schools form the conference so by investigating each school's athletic

website I was able to locate email addresses for possible participants. A preliminary email that

included a survey was sent to 51 possible participants in late January 2013 explaining the

purpose of the survey and asking for their participation (Appendix A). A second email reminding

all potential subjects was sent in mid-February 2013. Those who completed the survey after the

first request were removed from the second email. A final reminder was sent to possible

contributors in late February 2013 with the exception of those who already participated in the

survey. Survey responses were collected via the online format in Survey Monkey for analysis. As

noted in the previous section, the convenience of the electronic method played a major role in the

implementation.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the fall of 2014 quantitative data were analyzed in Survey Monkey and revealed

numbers, graphs, and percentages. I was able to see exactly how many participants responded

and how many surveys were completed entirely versus partially completed. As stated earlier,

partial surveys were exempt from being analyzed. Once all partial surveys were removed

compilation and analysis of the data were initiated, developmental profiles of the participants

were examined followed by the investigation of how traits were ranked per characteristic.

Among the 18 surveys that were completed I explored if there was variation among

participants according to each participant's developmental profile by comparing the number of

responses per question. The reason variation is vital to the research is to limit ambiguity within

the data. Results revealed that variation did exist as there was disparity between profiles,

specifically the number of seasons coached, the number of track and field seasons coached, the

events that participants coached, the level of education reached by each participant, experiences

as a coach and athlete, and the certifications or awards received as a coach or athlete.

The review of literature provided various traits that represented one of the five characteristics presented by Frost (2009). I composed a list of traits per each characteristic so participants could rank each trait from most important to least important. Next, I examined the results by computing the averages of each trait. Results showed how the average of each trait measured against other traits. This helped identify the most and least important traits according to the participating coaches. The reason each trait was compared is to provide coaches a more precise way to further develop their coaching method by increasing their awareness about what to do in practice, how to communicate, motivate athletes, develop athletes, and gain knowledge about track and field. In addition, I identified the top rated trait for each characteristic. With this information there is greater potential for coaches to achieve a higher level of effectiveness. The following chapter describes the results and discussion of my research design on the traits ranked per each characteristic by track and field coaches. The information suggests what coaches need to focus on in order to improve practices, communication, motivation, athlete development, and knowledge.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

The survey results were compiled to identify what traits were most and least important

for each of the six characteristics. In addition, results were analyzed to determine if any patterns

emerged. The survey (Appendix B) was organized into two sections, developmental profile and

characteristics of effective coaches, with the former separating into two parts, as a coach and as

an athlete. The developmental profiles were examined first, followed by the ranked traits per

characteristic.

Demographic Information

The results revealed that there were a total of 18 participants that completed the entire

survey. Demographic questions were asked in the form of a developmental profile to acquire

specific information about each participating coach in the study. The developmental profile was

arranged into two segments, developmental profile as a coach was examined first.

Question 1: Number of seasons coaching track and field?

Of the 18 participants, 28% acknowledged they coached track and field for 1-5 seasons,

39% coached for 6-10 seasons, 22% coached for 11-15 seasons, and 11% for 16-20 seasons. As a

result of these numbers, it was concluded that enough variance existed between the number of

seasons coached and the possible limitation of only surveying experienced or novice coaches

was discounted.

Question 2: Number of seasons coaching track and field in the WIAC?

This question is directly related to Question 1 as both refer to the number of seasons

coaching track and field, with this question addressing a specific conference. In fact, the results

are similar to those discovered in Question 1. There were 39% who spent 1-5 seasons coaching

in the WIAC, 33% have coached for 6-10 seasons, 17% coached for 11-15 seasons, and 11% for

16-20 seasons.

Question 3: Event(s) coached?

This set of responses illustrated that participants were not all coaching the same event and

that variation was evident. Subjects were allowed to make multiple selections based on specific

events they currently and previously coached. As a result, the actual numerical value was used

instead of the percentages for this particular question. The breakdown per how many subjects

coached each particular event is as follows: short sprints, 7; long sprints, 7; relays, 6; mid-

distance, 5; distance, 4; hurdles, 6; jumps, 8; throws, 6; pole vault, 4; multi-event, 8.

Question 4: Highest level of coaching education (or related field)?

Responses to this question were obtained to verify a combination of levels of education

among participants which was confirmed based on the results. There were 17% that received a

minor, 22% acquired a bachelor's degree, and 61% attained a master's degree.

Question 5: Annual hours of coaching education received?

This question is partially related to Question 4 as both refer to coaching education

however this question addresses the amount of annual time dedicated towards continuing

education in coaching. The results revealed that 72% receive 0-24 hours of coaching education

per year and the remaining 28% receive 25-48 hours.

Question 6: Certifications received?

This set of responses exhibited the various types of coaching certifications each

contributor attained. In addition, some certifications achieved recognized only a specific group or

event specialists, for example sprints, hurdles, and relays, and participants were asked to specify

these in their response if needed. Similar to Question 3, subjects were allowed to make multiple

selections based on certifications achieved, thus the actual numerical value was used instead of the percentages for this question as well. Note, one participant responded with "Other," but listed certifications that were not specific to coaching track and field and therefore was not included within the results. The breakdown per how many participants received any type of certification is as follows: USA track and field level one, 11; USA track and field level two, 3; USA track and field level three, 0; USTFCCCA academy certifications, 1; USTFCCCA academy endorsements, 1; USTFCCCA academy master endorsements, 0; other, 1.

Question 7: Coaching awards received?

The responses to this question showed if any coaching awards were received by any of the participants, and specify the award achieved if necessary. Results displayed 78% of the subjects did not receive a coaching award at the time of the survey. The remaining 22% did receive a coaching award of some variety.

Following the analysis of the first segment of the developmental profile, the second section was examined, developmental profile as an athlete.

Question 8: Level participated as athlete?

The majority of responses revealed that 89% of the participants were involved in Division III athletics. The remaining 11% were split evenly among two categories, 5.5% competed in National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the other 5.5% participated in Division II athletics. The results only confirm that most of the participants that coach at the Division III level also competed as an athlete at the Division III level. No other substantial evidence was found.

Question 9: Athletic awards received?

The responses to this question showed if any athletic awards were received by any of the

participants when they participated in athletics, and specify the award achieved if necessary.

Results displayed 83% of the subjects did receive an athletic award while the remaining 17% did

not receive an athletic award of some variety. The results only confirm that most of the subjects

that participated in Division III athletics also received an athletic award. No other substantial

evidence related to this study was found.

Ranking of Traits

Participants ranked traits per characteristic to acquire quantitative data for this study. As a

result, the levels of importance of each trait were identified. The characteristics in the survey

were pre-determined using criteria from Frost's (2009) study, as described in Chapter Three. The

data are reported for six characteristics in Tables 4.1 through 4.6. Participants ranked the traits

listed within each characteristic from most important (1) to least important (highest number of

traits within the characteristic). The tables highlight the number of participants that ranked each

trait's importance relative to the other traits listed in the characteristic.

Practice was the first characteristic where participants ranked traits. Table 4.1 displays

how the various traits were ranked for the *Practice* characteristic.

Table 4.1

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Practice from Most Important to Least
Important

Practice Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Content of practices	7	5	4	2	0	0	18	2.06
Duration of practice sessions	0	1	0	2	6	9	18	5.22
Efficiency of practices	1	4	7	4	0	2	18	3.22
Frequency of practices per week	0	1	4	5	4	4	18	4.33
Quality of practices	10	7	0	1	0	0	18	1.56
Quantity of practices per season	0	0	3	4	8	3	18	4.61

According to the results, the quality of practices was considered as the most important trait based on the lowest average (1.56) ranking and percentage (55.56%) of participants. Over half of the participants ranked the quality as the most important trait when it comes to practices. Content of practices was the second most important (2.06 average), as it was ranked most important by 38.89% of participants. Efficiency of practices, frequency of practices per week, and duration of practice sessions completed the rankings. Duration of practice sessions was clearly ranked the least important with the highest average rank of 5.22, from 50% of participants who ranked it as the least important.

The second characteristic, *Communication*, was hard to identify the most important trait since not one had an average ranking below 2 (see Table 4.2). The "level of trust" did have the lowest average ranking of 2.28 with nearly half of the population, 44.44% ranking it as the most important trait.

Table 4.2

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Communication from Most Important to Least Important

Communication Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6	7 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Clarifying importance of instruction	0	2	5	2	2	3	4	18	4.61
Clarity of message	5	4	1	4	0	4	0	18	3.11
Delivery of message	1	3	4	2	5	1	2	18	4.00
Giving feedback	0	2	3	7	3	3	0	18	4.11
Level of trust	8	5	1	1	2	1	0	18	2.28
Receiving feedback	0	1	3	2	4	5	3	18	5.00
Recruitment	4	1	1	0	2	1	9	18	4.89

As a result, the most important trait in *Communication* was the level of trust. The "Clarity of message" followed level of trust as second most important trait with an average of 3.11 from 27.78% ranking it as the most important. The remaining traits were very close and without the use of the mean, it would be quite difficult to examine the numbers and complete the rankings. So based on the mean, delivery of message, giving feedback, clarifying importance of instruction, recruitment, and receiving feedback finished the rankings. However, a very interesting observation occurred when considering the percentages because recruitment was found to be least important for 50% of the respondents, while concurrently, 22.22% felt it was most important and due to distribution, recruitment was the third most important trait overall in this category. This confirms how different the rankings could be based on the various participants involved.

Motivation was the third characteristic, and similar to the previous characteristic the most important trait was difficult to identify. When comparing the averages of all the traits (see Table 4.3), two had the same averages at 2.61, individual goal setting and intrinsic motivation.

Table 4.3

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Motivation from Most Important to Least Important

Motivation Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6	7 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Build strengths	0	1	4	7	2	1	3	18	4.39
Extrinsic motivation	0	0	1	2	4	3	8	18	5.83
Individual goal setting	2	8	5	1	2	0	0	18	2.61
Intrinsic motivation	8	3	1	2	3	0	1	18	2.61
Overcome weaknesses	0	1	2	3	3	6	3	18	5.11
Reach full potential	6	5	1	1	1	4	0	18	2.89
Team goal setting	2	0	4	2	3	4	3	18	4.56

However, 44.44% of participates ranked intrinsic motivation as the most important versus only 11.11% that ranked individual goal setting as most important. The remaining traits completed the rankings based on the average, reach full potential, build strengths, team goal setting, overcome weaknesses, and finally, extrinsic motivation which was clearly the least important with an average of 5.83 and 44.44% of participants ranking it as the least important trait of motivation.

The fourth characteristic that participants ranked traits for was *Athlete development – Physical*. The results in Table 4.4 reveal standard rankings where the most important trait, hard work, had the lowest average with 1.94, which was valued most by the greatest number of respondents.

Table 4.4

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Athletic development-Physical from Most Important to Least Important

Athletic Development-Physical Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Critique/Recommendations	0	3	1	9	5	18	3.89
Fun	2	5	8	3	0	18	2.67
Hard work	9	5	1	2	1	18	1.94
Preparation	7	3	6	2	0	18	2.17
Winning/Awards	0	2	2	2	12	18	4.33

Half of the participants (50%) ranked it as the most important out of all the traits. Similarly, the least important trait, winning/awards, had the highest average with 4.33 and the greatest percentage of participants (66.67%) ranking it as the least important. The remaining traits of *athlete development – physical* were ranked as follows: hard work, preparation, fun, critique/recommendations, and winning/awards.

Athlete development – Psycho/social was easier to identify the most important and least important traits. In Table 4.5, life skills was ranked as the most important trait by average (1.94) and percentage (44.44%) of participants who selected life skills as the most important trait.

Table 4.5

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Athletic development-Psycho/social from Most Important to Least Important

Athletic Development-Psycho/Social Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Age appropriate of skill advancement	1	0	1	9	7	18	4.17
Athletes view as special by self, coach, parents, significant other, etc.	2	3	8	2	3	18	3.06
Life skills	8	6	2	1	1	18	1.94
Sportsmanship/Behavior	5	7	4	1	1	18	2.22
Event readiness	2	2	3	5	6	18	3.61

The "Age appropriate of skill advancement" trait was deemed as least important based on the mean, 4.17, and the percentage, 38.89%. The remaining traits finished the rankings based on average, sportsmanship/behavior, athletes' views as special, and event readiness.

The final characteristic, *Knowledge*, clearly showed that coaching experiences was valued as most important with 50% of participants ranking it as such with an average ranking of 1.89 overall.

Table 4.6

The Number of Participants that Ranked Traits Related to Knowledge from Most Important to Least Important

Knowledge Traits	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important	Total	Average Ranking
Athletic experience	5	3	4	2	4	18	2.83
Coaching experience	9	4	3	2	0	18	1.89

Continuing education	2	5	3	3	5	18	3.22
Time management	2	6	7	3	0	18	2.61
Use of technology	0	0	1	8	9	18	4.44

This suggests that coaching experience is the most important trait contributing to the category of knowledge. The remaining traits were as follows: time management, athletic experience, continuing education, and use of technology which was clearly the least important with an average of 4.44 and 50% of participants ranking it as the least important factor of knowledge.

Figure 4.1 summarizes the findings by displaying the top rated trait for each characteristic.

Figure 4.1

Highest Ranked Trait within Each Characteristic
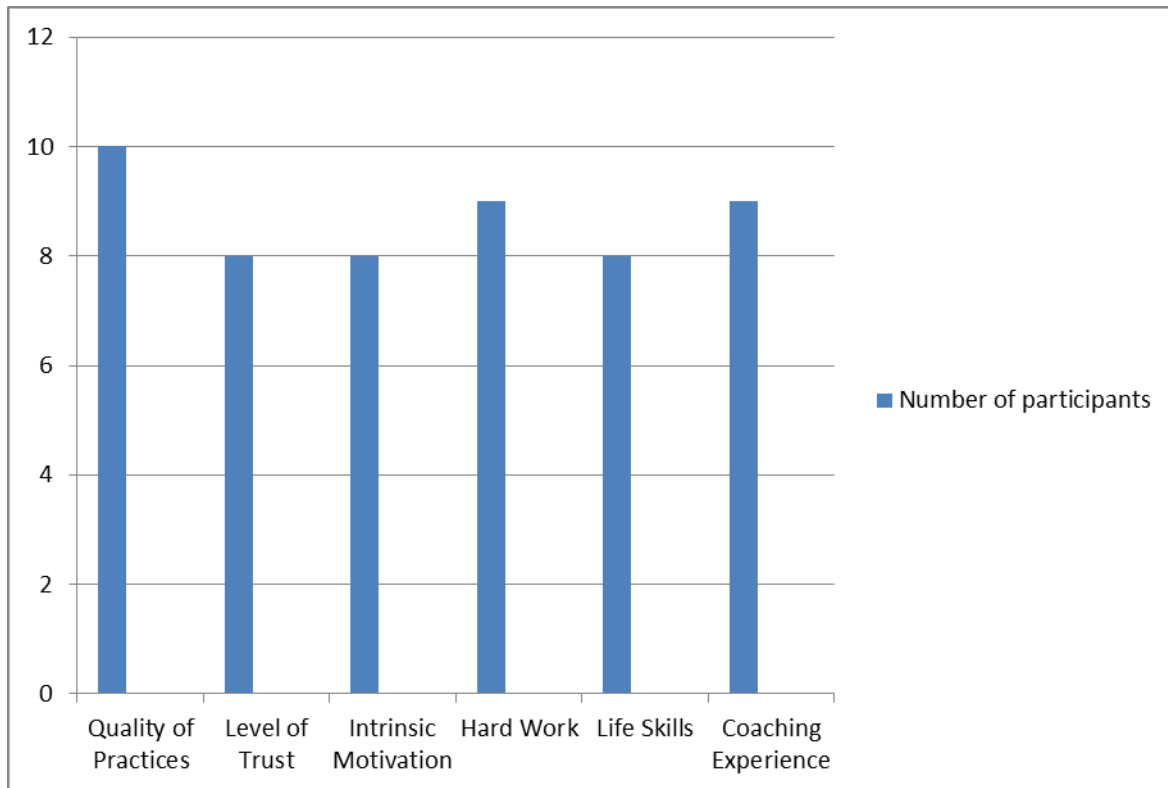
Chapter Five

Conclusion

The information provided in this research has the capability of helping promote the development of sport coaches while adding support to previous studies about the need for improved coaching education. In addition, the review of literature describes specific characteristics of effective coaches and the research design helps explain what traits are most important among each characteristic. The top traits per each characteristic were quality of practices, level of trust, intrinsic motivation, hard work, life skills, and coaching experience. Despite not being a top trait, it is important to note that all traits are important while some may even overlap into other characteristics depending on interpretation. What is significant is if coaches become more aware of these top traits and focus on these when developing their personal coaching philosophies, they can improve their coaching skills and potentially lead to greater levels of success.

The research included participants with a wide range of years coaching track and field and I was able to draw conclusions among characteristics between coaches with various years of experience as a coach and athlete, coaching various events, achieving different levels of education, and any certifications or awards received. There were no discernible associations found between such groups, but some measures prompted a possibility for future studies. The conclusions of the results were to explain how WIAC track and field coaches ranked traits for particular characteristics. The notion of comparing results based on developmental profiles of participating coaches and how they ranked particular traits per characteristic was a by-product of my results and data analysis. The overall assessment of the project focused on what traits effective track and field coaches sought as most important. This enabled me to provide coaches,

both current and aspiring coaches, a basis for where they needed to construct and be mindful of particular traits as they develop their own coaching philosophy. This by no means will lead coaches to ultimate success, but it provides useful information that could help coaches establish proper coaching traits beyond the coaching strategies that are recommended in literature that discusses how to improve performances of athletes. Examining the traits that coaches value has the potential to improve coaching with the possibility of achieving a higher level of success. The remaining sections in this chapter describe the conclusions of the research design specifically the developmental profiles and traits per each characteristic. In addition, limitations and recommendations are discussed to assist in future studies regarding the topic of characteristics of effective coaches.

Developmental Profile

At the beginning of the data analysis, I was surprised by the results in Question 3. Since each participant marked all of the applied event(s) that he or she coached, I did not expect for the numbers to be as evenly distributed. I was also surprised by the lack of continuing education on a yearly basis by participants. The results showed that nearly three-quarters of coaches experienced less than 24 hours on coaching education. The outcome may have differed if the wording of the question asked "annual hours of coaching education or related field received?" It may be that these coaches participate in professional development as lecturers themselves. Broadening this item has the potential to include training in other areas, such as sports administration. I was not surprised to discover that a majority of coaches received some type of track and field certification (72%), but what was unexpected was to find that 5 out of 18 participants reported no certification. I would have presumed that every coach would have a certification with more coaches that had multiple certifications.

The final question of the developmental profile explored whether or not participants received any coaching awards. If so, participants were asked to specify what awards were received. At the time surveys were completed, the 2013 indoor track and field season had yet to be concluded. More precisely, conference track meets had not taken place. Consequently, it is possible that some of the subjects that participated in this study received some type of coaching award. With this in mind, it was fair to conclude that about a quarter of the participants received some type of coaching recognition. Those that received awards were given significant honors in the sport of track and field. Most awards were nationally recognized, such as the "Regional (Assistant) Coach of the Year" award presented by USTFCCCA. One participant was honored with the "National Assistant Coach of the Year" award also presented by USTFCCCA. Other awards included conference and institution awards though these are not nationally recognized. There was no major surprise in these findings as possible participants for this study were selected from a region known to have coaches with established résumés.

Most (89%) subjects had participated at the Division III level as athletes. Additionally, the majority that competed also received athletic awards. Most were recognized for All-American or All-Conference. Both are significant athletic awards in track and field. Other awards included, team captain, MVP (most valuable player), scholar athlete, and sportsmanship awards. As a result, most of the subjects that coach in Division III not only competed at the Division III level, but received athletic awards. Thus, the level at which subjects participated as an athlete did not appear to influence how factors were ranked by participants. While most were recognized through awards as Division III athletes, their rankings varied.

Traits per Characteristic

After analyzing data regarding the ranking of traits per characteristic I discovered similar

trends within the responses of the participating coaches. I analyzed individual responses by

participants first, and then related those to the overall numerical data. In doing so, I found in

Question 10 that all but one participant (94%) listed either "content of practices" or "quality of

practices" as the most important traits regarding practices. Such evidence suggests that coaches

should strongly consider what it is they actually have their athletes doing in practice as well as

the quality at which they perform these acts (Gearity, 2012; Nash et al., 2009).

Question 11 was associated with communication. Coaches varied in what they perceived

were the most important aspects of communication. However, there was more agreement about

recruitment with 50% ranking it as the least important. This result is not surprising by any means

as the participants are coaches at the Division III level where scholarships are not rewarded, so

athletes compete for the joy of the sport and competition. This also relates to high school coaches

as most do not have the luxury to recruit, so recruitment would be the least important to them by

default. Despite the indefinite results, 72% ranked "level of trust" as most or second most

important trait relating to communication, this idea is supported by Gearity (2012) and Felton

and Jowett (2013) as they claim trust can help build a strong athlete-coach relationship which is

imperative to coach and athlete development.

Question 12 ranked traits with respect to motivation which showed the most variability in

the rankings. "Intrinsic motivation" and "reach full potential" were ranked as the most or second

most important by only 61% of participants while "Individual goal setting" was close behind at

56%. This evidence suggests that these three traits are what coaches should focus on with regards

to motivation. Conversely, 44% ranked "extrinsic motivation" as least important which is not

overwhelmingly high. Hoogestraat et al. (2014) suggests that motivation is difficult to interpret,

in part because there are different personalities among athletes. Each athlete is motivated

differently and what works for one athlete does not always work for another.

Question 13 had much clearer results than the previous two questions as it related to the physical development of athletes. A majority (89%) of participants ranked "hard work" or "preparation" as most important trait while 67% ranked "winning/awards" as least important. These results are not surprising as the two traits are closely related since with hard work comes being prepared and with preparation comes working hard. In research by Trninić et al. (2009), they argue that the essential pieces to athletes reaching their full potential include planning, programming, and execution.

Question 14 is similar to that of Question 13 in a focus on athletic development however this dimension centered on the psychological and social aspects. The most important trait was found to be "life skills" as 78% ranked it as the most or second most important trait. This is supported by Collins et al. (2009) as they explained that coaches placed a primary importance on athletic improvement through the development of life skills. The "age appropriate of skill advancement" was ranked least or second least important by 89% of participants which is understandable since the institutions of the participants have well established track and field programs. At the collegiate level, one can assume that most athletes have participated in track and field for a number of years and have achieved a certain level of skill. The age appropriateness factor is perhaps more important to consider in pre-collegiate programs, such as high school or middle school levels.

Question 15 explored the traits that contribute to the knowledge of a coach. Interestingly 94% ranked "use of technology" as least or second least important. This was surprising considering that technology has progressed and become ubiquitous with life. I feel as if "use of technology" will become a larger part of the coaching realm. Conversely, 72% of participants

ranked "coaching experience" as the most or second most important trait. Nash et al. (2009) explains that both athletic and coaching experience play a vital role in increasing coaching knowledge and improving the development as a coach. Nash et al. (2009) further explains that knowledge can be acquired by various methods, including clinics, seminars, reading, and observations. The research presented by Nash et al. (2009) does not identify one source particular for knowledge. It is ideal for any coach to continually develop by learning through various methods.

Limitations

The potential weaknesses of this project were that my sample was limited to one region, one level of competition, and a single sport. Due to the sample I chose to investigate, I could not determine if location, level, or sport influenced these coaches' perceptions. While narrowing the study to particular characteristics that allowed for an in-depth examination as to specific traits that influenced effective coaching, had coaches from another region or a different level or sport participated in the study, it is possible the results would have differed.

Another possible limitation surfaced during the analysis of the demographic information. Some of the questions were not specific enough, for instance Question 7 and Question 9 inquired about receiving coaching and athletic awards, respectively. A more precise listing of the types of awards, such as "athletic awards received at the collegiate level," might provide information to examine the potential influence that recognition may have on coaches' perceptions.

Another possible limitation appeared with the traits that participants needed to rank. It is possible that the participants did not agree with the traits, or felt that a particular trait should have been labeled under a different characteristic. I would encourage a qualitative study to explore reasons behind rankings or further investigate what traits participants agreed with.

Recommendations

My research design focused on Divisions III track and field coaches only, so one recommendation would be to expand to various coaching levels such as Divisions I, Division II, or high school. By expanding the search, results of how the traits ranked may be different which could affect what traits coaches should concentrate on when developing their philosophy. Additionally, possible participants could include coaches from various sports (i.e. football, basketball, tennis, volleyball, etc.). The different rankings could be compared to see what traits should be focused on depending on what level or sport is being coached.

I also did not specify how long participants needed to coach an event, or when they needed to be coaching the event. Participants may have achieved success in one event, but struggled in a different event using the same strategies. As a result, they could have stopped coaching a particular event due to lack of success, but selected it in the survey as a coached event. I would recommend that an additional question about the number of seasons an event was coached be asked.

Another recommendation would be a qualitative data collection of the ranking of traits that would explain why coaches ranked particular traits the way they did. This would help refine the results and improve the study. Furthermore, the results collected could be applied to a post-assessment process of coaching development to further understand what traits were beneficial and what ones were not as beneficial.

The process used to conduct the project revealed a variety of opinions and ideas. The purpose of this research was to conduct a descriptive study that explores traits ranked by track and field coaches to improve coaching. While more research regarding traits of track and field coaches should be examined, this study helps support the need for improved coaching education

and could be used as a model to explore perceptions of coaches in other sports as well.

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Appendix

Appendix A
Solicitation of Participants Email

This represents the message that was sent to potential participants via Survey Monkey.

My name is Robert Martin, I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and I am conducting a survey as part of my capstone project. I would greatly appreciate your participation in completing this 15 question survey. This study is being conducted to examine characteristics of effective track and field coaches with the hope of enhancing the development of coaches at any level. This survey is completely confidential and results will be presented anonymously within the research. Participation is completely voluntary as there is no reward for completing the survey, but your input is invaluable. Again, I would greatly appreciate your time and cooperation in completing this survey. Click the (URL) below to start the survey. Thank you for your participation!

URL to survey:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/?sm=cIa9d_2FamOfnsMoXECvMMvA_3D_3D

Robert Martin
Graduate Student
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Appendix B
Survey

Characteristics of Effective Track and Field Coaches

Developmental Profile

As a Coach
1. *Number of seasons coaching track and field*

   o   1-5
   o   6-10
   o   11-15
   o   16-20
   o   20+

2. *Number of seasons coaching track and field in the WIAC*

   o   1-5
   o   6-10
   o   11-15
   o   16-20
   o   20+

3. *Event(s) coached*

   o   Short sprints
   o   Long sprints
   o   Relays
   o   Mid distance
   o   Distance
   o   Hurdles
   o   Jumps
   o   Throws
   o   Pole vault
   o   Multi-event athletes

4. *Highest level of coaching education (or related field)*

   o   Minor
   o   Bachelor Degree
   o   Master Degree
   o   Doctorate

5. *Annual hours of coaching education received*

   o   0-24
   o   25-48
   o   49-72
   o   72+

6. *Certifications received*

   o   USA track and field level 1
   o   USA track and field level 2 (please list specific event group below)

- USA track and field level 3 (please list specific event group below)
- USTFCCCA academy certifications (please specify below)
- USTFCCCA academy endorsements (please specify below)
- USTFCCCA academy master endorsements (please specify below)
- Other (please specify below)
- None

7. *Coaching awards received (conference, regional, national)*

- None
- Other (please specify)

Developmental Profile

As an Athlete

8. *Level participated as athlete*

- Junior Varsity High School
- Varsity High School
- NAIA
- Junior College
- Division I
- Division II
- Division III
- Other (please specify)

9. *Athletic awards received*

- None
- Other (please specify)

Characteristics of Effective Coaches

Rank Factors per Each Characteristic

10. *Practices*

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6 Least Important
Content of practices	○	○	○	○	○	○
Duration of practice sessions	○	○	○	○	○	○
Efficiency of practices	○	○	○	○	○	○
Frequency of practices per week	○	○	○	○	○	○
Quality of practices	○	○	○	○	○	○
Quantity of practices per season	○	○	○	○	○	○

11. Communication

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6	7 Least Important
Clarifying importance of instruction	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Clarity of message	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Delivery of message	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Giving feedback	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Level of trust	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Receiving feedback	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Recruitment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

12. Motivation

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5	6	7 Least Important
Build strengths	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Extrinsic motivation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Individual goal setting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intrinsic motivation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overcome weaknesses	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reach full potential	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Team goal setting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

13. Athlete Development - Physical

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important
Critique/Recommendations	○	○	○	○	○
Fun	○	○	○	○	○
Hard work	○	○	○	○	○
Preparation	○	○	○	○	○
Winning/Awards	○	○	○	○	○

14. Athlete Development – Psycho/Social

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important
Age appropriate of skill advancement	○	○	○	○	○

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important
Athletes view as special by self, coach, parents, significant other, etc.	○	○	○	○	○
Life skills	○	○	○	○	○
Sportsmanship/Behavior	○	○	○	○	○
Event readiness	○	○	○	○	○

15. Knowledge

	1 Most Important	2	3	4	5 Least Important
Athletic experience	○	○	○	○	○
Coaching experience	○	○	○	○	○
Continuing education	○	○	○	○	○
Time management	○	○	○	○	○
Use of technology	○	○	○	○	○