OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF PERTH TRIP

Dr Paul Perkins

High Performance Coach Development Advisor Australian Institute of Sport
Associate Professor University of Canberra Research Institute for Sport and Exercise

Background

In November 2021, the Australian Institute of Sport launched the AIS Coach Summit Program. It is designed to meet the needs of coaches who are working at the highest level of the Australian sport system and underpinned by an acknowledgement that they have capacity to be architects of their own learning journeys. Experience accumulated and documented over a 17-month period suggests that the coaches participating in the program have a willingness to explore this capacity, especially if appropriately supported with the task. This short report aims to highlight the benefits of this

Autonomous-led approach to the attainment of knowledge by shedding some light on a recent 3-day Summit learning experience.

Key points

The 3-day event achieved a number of positive outcomes, including:

> Implementation of important evaluation findings.

> Achievement of interactional obligations.

> Generation of social media publicity for the AIS and program partners.

> Establishment of new friendship groups and key contacts.

> Valuable time spent with WAIS-based PhD candidate.

> Achievement of engagement outcomes that is allowing the program to evolve in ways advocated by the coaches.

> Facilitation of meaningful interactions and the initiation of self-driven learning processes that encouraged the sharing of personal views and construction of new knowledge.

> Exploration of new ideas across a diverse range of social

learning spaces (e.g., cafes, restaurants, DTEs and competition settings).

> Realisation of original plans to use the Summit program as a vehicle to promote the benefits of more social and collaborative approaches to learning.

> High-levels of engagement between Summit participants, AIS Coach development team members, Diving Australia personnel, Gen 2032 coaches, Hockey Australia staff and QAS, NSWIS and WAIS employees.

The week that was: An interpretive account

The following provides a brief overview of the 3-day event and is intended to contextualise what was observed by the author based on his personal perspective and situational experiences.

Day One: Tuesday 23rd May

The first gathering was held at a local hotel and it could not have gone any better! The informal setting not only provided a non-judgmental space for "newcomers" and "old-timers" to meet each other, it also highlighted the social and collaborative nature of learning and the ways in which it is situated in the dynamic interactions of everyday life. Key observations from the first event were:

> The group had a diverse range of skills, expertise and knowledge.

> Everyone was really happy to be there.

> The relaxed setting encouraged group discussions and the sharing of information.

> There were multiple interacting learning trajectories and partnerships.

> Members knew about each other and the contributions they

Paul Perkins is an associate Professor at the University of Canberra and a member of the Australian Institute of Sport High Performance Coach Development Team. He is a dedicated, passionate and experienced coach, educator and researcher with an extensive background in the Australian sport sector and a passion for helping others and seeing people succeed. Paul is skilled at, and highly experienced in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating multi-layered sport-based development initiatives and has a thorough understanding of deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning and how these different processes can be used to draw conclusions, make predictions, and/or construct explanations. Whilst Paul's research has been multi-disciplinary and positioned within the broader societal context, he is currently exploring the benefits of more social and collaborative approached to coach learning and is interested in contributing to long-term positive outcomes through the use of Australian First Nations methodologies.

have made to their respective domains.

> Everyone appeared satisfied that their individual perspectives had been understood and respected.

> Yarning and storytelling (narrative psychology) proved to be a highly effective interpersonal knowledge generating tool.

Day Two: Wednesday 24th May

The second day provided a number of "real world" learning experiences for the Summit coaches, including:

> Observation of expert coaching and different pedagogical approaches.

> The sharing of different perspectives, stories and experiences.

> Exploring how existing individual characteristics influence and are influenced by the behaviour of others and the environments people inhabit.

> Discussing how respectful, democratic and autonomous supportive learning environments are created.

> Investigating the benefits of interprofessional learning.

> Yarning about the importance of peer interactions and the ways in which collective wisdom creates new actionable knowledge and know-how.

> Reflecting on what coaches could do to create more conducive learning environments.

Day Three: Thursday 25th May

The third and final day of the trip was highly productive and reenforced the idea that

the key to effective 21st century coaching is not only the acquisition of sport-specific knowledge but the development of a broad range of skills that empower coaches to dream big and achieve big by transforming critical pieces of information into tangential assets (e.g., new thoughts, behaviour and solutions). Key learnings from day three were:

> Meaningful relationships between coaches from different sports combined with regular periods of cricital self-reflection could facilitate learning at the boundaries

of different domains and create opportunities for the achievement of coaching knowledgeability.

> **Effective HP coach development occurs in complex social environments** and involves active participation and manipulation of experiences and conversations.

> Real-world conditions create opportunities for coaches to engage with and explore personally identified topics of interest.

> HP coach learning is **situated in authentic and meaningful contexts** and needs the inputs of more knowledgeable others (social learning leaders) and peer interactions to be effective.

> Events like today provide mechanisms through which new knowledge, skills and behaviours can be very effectively acquired.

Concluding comments

The 3-day Summit event provided lot of learnings that could assist with the achievement of long-term outcomes for the AIS Coach Development Team. The following summarises these points and is intended to serve as a basis for future discussions.

> Coach learning is most pronounced when readiness to learn is high.

> Provision should be made for individualising the timing of future opportunities.

> Effective HP coach development requires highly personalised and self-directed learning journeys.

> Multiple strategies and approaches are required for effective professional development.

> Regular engagement in reflective practice activities can greatly assist the knowledge production process and enable new ideas to be transformed into practical solutions.

> Effective HP coach development is a socially constructed activity that involves the re-shaping, re-producing and re-using of shared information rather than the direct transfer of original material.

> Coach learning is highly serendipitous and we need to get better at utilising existing social learning spaces (e.g., DTEs and competition settings).

> Cognitive empathy, cognitive structures, cognitive conservatism, cognitive dissonance and cognitive housecleaning play important roles in the learning process and need to be considered when designing future events.

> Implementation of future initiatives with similar concepts seem well-justified since such endeavours may allow realisation of highly effective development opportunities.

> Maintaining the current degree of coach engagement in the Summit program will almost certainly depend on allowing it to evolve in ways advocated by the coaches themselves, so that it can become ever better at meeting their learning needs.

Additional thoughts and things to consider

Traditional methods used in coaching research have largely followed a positivistic approach. A key concept of this paradigm is reductionism, which attempts to understand the whole through an analysis of its individual parts. This mechanistic perceptive views behaviour as measurable and controllable and aims to present generalised conceptual models of the processes under investigation. It is an approach that has been well embraced by coach development scholars and resulted in an oversimplifying conceptualisation of the coaching process. For example, a common criticism of this perceptive is that it presents a representation of coaching that is divorced from the messiness of the reality and reflects an assumption that there is a knowable sequence of decisions over which coaches have complete control. Concerns have also been raised that such an approach fails to acknowledge the intricacies, ambiguities and unique demands of the role and takes little account of the social, moral and cultural influences that underpin these highly complex interpersonal processes.

On the other hand, by acknowledging that the process is reliant on the constant negotiation of interactions, effective coaching can be thought of as an evolving process that requires an ability to initiate specific actions in the context of uncertain circumstances based on the ecological constraints of a situation. By conceptualising it this way, we can see how effective practices are not totally predetermined or entirely individualised but collectively constructed from flexible reactions to unforeseeable situational characteristics. However, and perhaps most importantly, when considered through this lens, coaching can be seen as a negotiated, non-linear practice that requires constant adjustment and situational-specific responses, rather than just the activation of pre-ordained plans.