

Sources of Expectancy Information among Coaches: A Cross Cultural Investigation

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Participation in and observation of sporting events boasts a long history across time and cultures. The enormous popularity of sport has led to the development of the coaching profession. Using the framework of expectancy theory, the purpose of this study was to explore the sources of information coaches from two cultures utilize to evaluate athletic ability. Over 600 coaches from the United States (US) and Germany served as sample members. The participants were issued the Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; Solomon, 2008). Results demonstrated that US coaches rated all four SESS factors (Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, Maturity) significantly higher than their German counterparts. Further groups comparisons were conducted based on gender (male, female), coach status (head, assistant), and sport type (team, individual). A common trend is the finding that regardless of group, coaches prioritized the factors in an identical order. These results are discussed in terms of practical implications for future coach training.

The profession of coaching is a unique job in the world of sport. From the youth sport coach to the professional ranks, the duties are both distinct and similar. For instance, many coaches of youth sport are volunteers who commit time to develop the talents of young athletes. Conversely, coaches of professional teams may earn millions of dollars in salary and bonuses if they take their teams to championship events. However regardless of competitive level, the primary duty of coaches is to develop the athletic skills of their players in order to win contests. Furthermore, this duty appears to be salient among coaches of varied cultures (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995).

Sport scholars have generated hundreds of empirical studies, which inquire into the role of coaches. Recent researchers have created models of coaching both from the perspective of coaches (Côté et al., 1995) and athletes (Becker, 2009). In sum, we know that coaches have the capacity to exert a huge impact on the individuals they mentor. major theoretical framework, expectancy theory, has been

employed to determine how The process by which this impact occurs is researched through a variety of lenses. One coaches influence the behavior of athletes. The expectancy cycle suggests that coaches proceed through a four-step process in the evaluation and development of athletes (Horn, Lox, & Labrador, 2010). In short, step one occurs as coaches assess athlete ability using a variety of factors labeled *impression cues*. The primary cues utilized by coaches are personal (e.g., age, height, somatotype), performance (e.g., power, coordination, agility), and psychological (e.g., anxiety, confidence, motivation). In step two, coaches interact with athletes and their treatment is effected by the assumptions made in step one of the cycle. Athletes deemed high expectancy are issued more feedback and better quality feedback than their low expectancy teammates (Solomon, Striegel, Eliot, Heon, Maas, & Wayda, 1996). Step three involves the athletes' responses to the treatment. The treatment offered in step two influences athlete behavior and consequently, performance. In step four, coaches' initial impressions are validated and the cycle begins anew.

The vast majority of research using the framework of expectancy theory in the context of competitive sport has explored the dynamic

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occurring in step two. A series of studies at the interscholastic and intercollegiate levels found that expectancy level (high or low) does moderate the type of feedback issued by the coaches. Specifically, head coaches offered more instruction and praise to their high expectancy athletes (Solomon, et al., 1996; Solomon, DiMarco, Ohlson, & Reece, 1998).

Another line of research sought to determine if coaches' expectations of athletes are stable or flexible over the course of a competitive season. The consistent findings suggest that coaches are perceptually inflexible (Solomon, Golden, Ciaponni, & Reece, 1998; Solomon & Harrah, 2007; Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996). When coaches make their player assessments at the beginning of the season, those evaluations do not change. This finding holds true for high school and college coaches, as well as head and assistant coaches. Therefore, once an athlete is deemed high or low expectancy that label is not altered.

A third line of inquiry assessing expectancy effects in competitive sport determined the relationship between impression cue and athlete performance. A series of studies were conducted and found that for head coaches, perceptions of athlete psychological qualities predicted actual performance (Solomon, 2001a; 2002a). However, when examining assistant coaches, perceptions of athlete physical ability predicted performance (Solomon, 2001b; 2002b). Clearly, coaches are relying on different cues to evaluate athlete ability depending on their coaching role.

A major omission in the expectancy literature in sport is the identification of salient impression cues utilized in step one of the expectancy cycle. The early research assumed that coaches rely predominantly on performance cues (Horn, 1984; Rejeski, Darracott, & Hutslar, 1979; Solomon, et al., 1996). In order to establish expectancy level (high, medium, low), coaches were simply asked to rank order their players from most to least skilled. This is problematic for two reasons. One, the researchers did not define skill for the coach. Two, a ranking system does not consider the degree of difference among athletes. In an attempt to explore coach usage of impression cues,

Solomon (2001a) determined that coaches also employ psychological factors as they assess athletic ability.

Based on this finding, a four-phase investigation to determine the exact qualities coaches employ in their evaluation of athletes (step one) was conducted (Solomon, 2008; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). The results suggest that coaches utilize a variety of impression cues housed in four factors: Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity. A new instrument, the Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; Solomon, 2008), was created which allows researchers to determine the specific sources of information coaches are using to assess athlete ability. This 30-item tool provides the researcher with a host of qualities utilized by coaches to evaluate athletes.

Using the SESS, Becker and Solomon (2005) determined the primary sources of expectancy information used by intercollegiate Division I head basketball coaches. There were three key findings of this study. One, coaches prioritize psychological factors when evaluating athlete ability. Two, successful (win percentage > 60%) and less successful (win percentage < 50%) coaches do not differ in their utilization of impression cues when evaluating athlete ability. While level of success did not predict impression cue usage, the third finding showed that athletes playing for more successful coaches were aware of how they were being evaluated; athletes playing for less successful coaches were not cognizant of how they were being evaluated. The authors concluded that while level of success did not differentiate cue utilization, the ability to communicate those expectations differed. Successful basketball coaches conveyed to their athletes the qualities they expected in order to improve athletically.

The current study sought to assess the utility of the SESS with coaches outside of the United States. While Duda and Allison (1990) voiced a plea for cross-cultural exploration in sport psychology over 20 years ago, there are few studies that accept the challenge and seek to comprehend the complex world of sport coaching. The type of training coaches receive varies significantly across cultures. While there

may be some common techniques to train specific skills, the delivery of the information can be quite distinct. In addition, while it is fair to say that all coaches seek to develop the physical abilities of their athletes, the value of training the mental game varies. The incorporation of mental skills training among athletes in the United States (US) has a longer tradition than among Germans. For instance, in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing China, the US team was accompanied by 17 sport psychology consultants; Germany brought two sport psychologists to these summer games. It was the first time in history that the German team was supported by trained sport psychologists at the Olympic Games. However, an investigation of attitudes toward sport psychology consulting among three cultures found that “athletes from the United States were more likely to have a stigma toward seeking sport psychology than were athletes from the United Kingdom and Germany...” (Martin, Lavalley, Kellmann, & Page, 2004, p. 154). While sport psychology services are more prevalent in the US, perceptions among athletes vary considerably. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to conduct a cross-cultural exploration of the relevance of the items (N=30) and factors (N=4) housed in the SESS. A secondary purpose was to pursue group comparisons (gender, coach status, sport type) to further test the utility of this instrument across a large sample of high-level coaches. Therefore, four research questions guided this investigation. One, are there significant differences in expectancy sources used by coaches in the US compared to coaches in Germany? Two, are there significant differences in expectancy sources between male and female coaches? Three, are there significant differences in expectancy sources between head and assistant coaches? Four, are there significant differences in expectancy sources between team and individual sport coaches?

Method

Participants

The major purpose of this study was to compare coaches in the United States (US) to coaches in Germany. Therefore, two distinct methods were

employed to generate the sample for this study. To identify coaches for the US portion of the sample, two National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions were randomly selected from each of the 50 states. There were a few exceptions. One, there were six states which had only one NCAA Division I program (Maine, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming) and all six programs were invited. Two, one state did not have a Division I program (Alaska). Three, Washington DC boasts four Division I programs, and two were randomly selected to be included in the sample. Thus, a total of 93 NCAA Division I athletic programs were identified. All head and assistant coaches were invited to participate; volunteer and graduate assistant coaches were excluded.

The sampling procedure for the German coaches involved two methods. One, the project was reported in the newsletter of the German Coaches Academy. Two, German sport federations were contacted via email and asked to send the announcement to their member coaches. The email request was sent to the directors who are in regular contact with the members. In cases where the email addresses of coaches were publicly available, we contacted them directly. All coaches were asked to send the request to other

coaches thus generating a snowball system of data collection. In total, the sample consisted of 610 coaches; 274 intercollegiate coaches from the US representing 21 different sports and 336 German coaches representing 20 different sports.

Measures

There were two instruments utilized for this study. A demographic questionnaire was administered to access relevant background information. The Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; Solomon, 2008) was employed to answer the research questions.

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire was created for use in this study. This measure accessed the

following information: age, gender, coach status (head, assistant), target sport, years of coaching experience, and personal athletic experience.

Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; Solomon, 2008)

The Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale is a 30-item tool (See Appendix A) scored on a 7-point Likert scale. Each item is categorized into one of four factors: Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, or Maturity. Adequate psychometric properties have been verified (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Solomon, 2008). The SESS was formally translated with the assistance of a professional translation business. This process involved translating the items into German, then back translating into English. Throughout the process, items are adapted for clarity. The German version of the SESS (SESS-G) was pilot tested to satisfy validity and reliability (See Appendix B).

Procedures

Approval for this investigation was received from the University Institutional Review Board. The US coaches at the 93 NCAA Division I athletic programs were each sent an electronic letter of invitation with a link to the questionnaires which were hosted on a survey website. Informed consent was obtained via acceptance of the invitation and completion of the instruments. Similarly, coaches in Germany were issued the letter of invitation with a link to the survey website. After a two-week period, all completed questionnaires were tabulated.

Results

The demographic questionnaire provided a descriptive profile of the sample members. Overall, there were 451 male and 158 female coaches. Their ages ranged from 17-71. The sample demographics are located in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age: All Coaches	37.28	10.76
Age: US Coaches	36.56	10.58
Age: German Coaches	37.80	10.88
Playing Experience	18.89	9.61
Coaching Experience	14.43	9.67
Gender	Male	Female
All	451	158
US	164	109
German	287	49

Nationality

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to answer the first research question. The independent variable was nationality (US, German) and the dependent variables were the four SESS factors:

Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity. Results indicated that the US coaches scored significantly higher on all four factors, Wilks = 7.245, $p < .01$. The means and standard deviations are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

SESS Means and Standard Deviations by Culture

Group		Variables							
Coachability		Team Player		Physical Ability		Maturity			
M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S		
US		5.90	.894	5.60	.860	5.55	.923	5.28	.890
German		5.59	.773	5.41	.763	5.33	.946	4.93	.970

Gender

To compare usage of the SESS factors between males and females, a MANOVA was performed. Results show that on three factors, Team Player, Physical Ability and Maturity, there were no gender differences. However, female coaches reported significantly higher scores on Coachability, Wilks = 6.639, $p < .001$. The resultant data are posted in Table 3.

Table 3

SESS Means and Standard Deviations by Gender

Group	Variables							
	Coachability		Team Player		Physical Ability		Maturity	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Male	5.68	.865	5.46	.836	5.41	.957	5.06	.969
Female	5.85	.771	5.60	.736	5.48	.899	5.16	.892

Coach Status

Another MANOVA procedure was employed to compare head and assistant coaches on the four SESS factors. Assistant coaches reported significantly higher scores on all four factors, Wilks = 7.886, $p < .05$. The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

SESS Means and Standard Deviations by Coach Status

Group	Variables							
	Coachability		Team Player		Physical Ability		Maturity	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Head	5.65	.829	5.44	.802	5.34	.957	5.02	.970
Assistant	5.89	.852	5.61	.825	5.61	.888	5.22	.900

Sport Type

The final research question compared team versus individual sport coaches. On three factors, Coachability, Physical Ability and Maturity, there were no differences between the two groups of coaches. However, team sport coaches reported significantly higher scores on one factor, Team Player, Wilks = 7.389, $p < .01$. The relevant data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

SESS Means and Standard Deviations by Sport Type

Group	Variables							
	Coachability		Team Player		Physical Ability		Maturity	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Team	5.71	.795	5.57	.757	5.48	.900	5.09	.903
Individual	5.76	.937	5.34	.904	5.32	1.024	5.08	1.044

Discussion

The current study sought to identify patterns of factors utilized to judge athlete development among coaches in the United States (US) and Germany. Furthermore, comparisons were made

between coaches based on gender (male, female), coach status (head or assistant), and sport type (team or individual).

Nationality

Results indicated some striking differences between the perceptions of coaches trained in the two countries. Coaches in the US rated all four factors housed in the Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; Solomon, 2008) higher than their German counterparts. Recall that the SESS was created employing samples of Division I intercollegiate coaches in the United States. Despite the fact that the SESS was formally translated into German, then translated back into English, the instrument may not capture the primary sources utilized by German coaches as they assess athletic ability. Past research suggests that US and German track and field coaches use different sources of information as they gain sport knowledge and that the knowledge base available to US coaches is superior to the German system (Kruger & Casselman, 1982). Recent cross-cultural research on training methods among physical educators found that preferred practices varied among the nations represented (Cothran, Kulinna, Banville, Choi, Amade-Escot, MacPhail, et al., 2005). They concluded that the “cultural influences on teachers’ beliefs...were significantly different from each other in their beliefs about the potential benefits of the teaching styles” (p. 198). A further examination of coach training in Germany is warranted in order to provide an accurate depiction of preferred evaluative sources. However, it is also interesting to note that regardless of nationality, all coaches prioritized the four factors in the same order: Coachability, Team Player,

Physical Ability, and Maturity. This finding confirms what past research suggests, that coaches do not prioritize physical ability components over psychological components when evaluating athlete ability (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Solomon, 2010; Solomon & Rhea, 2008).

Gender

A second key finding is that female and male coaches were similar in their reporting of factors employed to evaluate athlete ability. Regardless of gender, coaches rated Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity in an identical manner. However, female coaches rated Coachability higher than male coaches. While it is speculative to interpret at this stage, one could consider that female coaches solely coach other females, while male coaches instruct both male and female teams. Furthermore, female athletes report a preference for male coaches (Frey, Czech, Kent, & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, athlete gender might influence this finding (Tuffey, 1995). Parallel to the first outcome, both females and males prioritized the four factors in an identical pattern: Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity.

Coach Status

In order to test the third question, the sample was divided by coaching role and head coaches were compared to assistant coaches. Interestingly, the assistant coaches rated all four

factors higher than the head coaches. While there is scant research on the unique role of the assistant, one recent study using the SESS found no differences in prioritization of expectancy sources among junior college head and assistant coaches (Solomon, 2010). However, other studies report distinct differences between the two coaching roles. Clearly the duties of head and assistant coaches vary; assistant coaches are oftentimes tasked with specific responsibilities within the team structure while head coaches must account for the functionality of the entire team (Solomon, Striegel et al., 1996). Not only are duties varied, but approaches to coaching also appear disparate between head and assistants. Specifically, assistant coaches rated physical ability as more predictive of actual athlete performance (Solomon, 2001b; 2002b) while head coaches rated a psychological quality (confidence) as more predictive of athlete performance (Solomon, 2001a; 2002a). Considering the difference found between US and German coaches overall, it may be premature to group these two cultures by coaching role. But again, it must be noted that the order of prioritization remained uniform regardless of coaching role: Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity.

Sport Type

Our final analysis divided coaches by sport type. Specifically, team sport coaches (i.e., basketball, soccer, volleyball) were compared to individual sport coaches (i.e., gymnastics, tennis, track & field). Results determined that regardless of sport type, coaches reported similar results across three factors: Coachability, Physical Ability, and Maturity. However, the Team Player factor was rated higher among team sport coaches.

It is intuitively logical to prioritize team dimensions when coaching a team sport, which involves a higher level of task cohesion than individual sport coaches (Carron, Colman, & Wheeler, 2002; Kozub & Button, 2000). This finding serves to reinforce the ecological validity of the SESS.

Practical Implications

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, practical implications must be voiced with caution. One overarching finding was that regardless of grouping, coaches prioritized the four factors in a uniform sequence: Coachability, Team Player, Physical Ability, and Maturity. Oftentimes coach training programs focus exclusively on technical forms of instruction which are consonant with the Physical Ability factor. Clearly coaches find that psychological factors (Coachability) and team dynamics (Team Player) are important elements to consider when evaluating athlete ability. Coach training programs may benefit from the direct inclusion of strategies that address some of the items represented in these two factors. See Appendix C for a list of items housed in each of the four SESS factors.

Future Directions

The most salient finding from this cross-cultural exploration was that US coaches rated all four factors significantly higher than the German coaches. Methods for evaluating player ability may differ by culture. In order to determine the primary sources of expectancy information for coaches trained in the German system, a parallel qualitative inquiry is recommended (Solomon & Rhea, 2008). As previously reported, the implementation of mental skills training for athletes is more common in the US compared to Germany. Note that the Coachability factor consists predominantly of psychological factors. It would be revealing to ask German-trained coaches about how they judge athlete ability. This may reveal factors yet discovered.

Conclusion

The profession of coaching requires the ability to evaluate athletes, provide instruction, monitor improvement, and create an environment where these qualities coalesce into successful performances. This begins with an accurate assessment of athlete talent. Qualities utilized to evaluate athletic ability appear to vary by culture. Further inquiry exploring coach training programs across the globe will only serve to enhance coach development in the United States and abroad.

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Appendix A

Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; 2008)

Directions: Below is a list of factors that coaches may consider when assessing athlete ability. Complete the sentence highlighted below by filling in each factor. Please read each sentence carefully and circle the response that reflects your perception when evaluating ability in college athletes. Circle the number of the response that identifies your use of that factor when assessing your players' athletic ability.

When evaluating athlete ability, _____ is a component which I use a majority of the time.

Very		Very
Strongly	Strongly	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	Uncertain	Agree
	Agree	Agree

1. Self Discipline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Strength	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Love of the Sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Team Chemistry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Confidence Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Role Acceptance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Reaction Time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Handling Pressure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Concentration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Speed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Mental Maturity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Competitive Demeanor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Receptivity to Coaching	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Athleticism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Willingness to Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Willingness to Learn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Integrity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Courage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Trust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Being a Hard Worker	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Honesty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Leadership Qualities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Respect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Coordination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. High Aspirations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Agility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. Athletic Experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Ability to Use Good Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Making Complete Assessments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B

Solomon Expectancy Sources Scale (SESS; 2008)

Fragebogen zu Grundlagen von Trainererwartung (GTE; 2008)

Anleitung: Sie finden nachstehend eine Liste mit Aspekten, die Trainer und Trainerinnen verwenden, wenn sie die Fähigkeiten ihrer Sportler und Sportlerinnen bewerten. Ergänzen Sie den vorgegebenen Lückensatz jeweils gedanklich durch die vorgegebenen 30 Aspekte. Lesen Sie jeden Satz bewusst durch und überlegen Sie dann, welche Bedeutung der jeweilige Aspekt für die Bewertung der Sportler und Sportlerinnen hat. Kreuzen Sie dann die entsprechende Antwortmöglichkeit an.

Wenn ich die Fähigkeiten meines Athleten/meiner Athletin bewerte, ist _____ ein Aspekt, den ich hauptsächlich verwende.

		stimme gar nicht zu	stimme nicht zu	stimme eher nicht zu	un- sicher	stimme eher zu	stimme zu	stimme voll zu
1.	Selbstdisziplin	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	Kraft	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	Liebe zum Sport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	Teamfähigkeit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	Ausmaß des Selbstbewusstseins	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	Rollenakzeptanz	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	Reaktionszeit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	Umgang mit Druck	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Konzentration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Schnelligkeit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Geistige Reife	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	Konkurrenzverhalten	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	Empfänglichkeit für Traineranweisungen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	Athletik	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Bereitschaft zu zuhören	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	Lernbereitschaft	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	Echtheit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	Mut	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	Kommunikative Kompetenz	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	Vertrauen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	Arbeitsmoral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	Ehrlichkeit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	Führungsqualität	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	Respekt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25.	Koordinative Fähigkeit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	Hohe Zielsetzung	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	Gewandtheit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	Erfahrung	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	Strategisches Denken	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30.	Situationsanalyse	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix C

8. Handling pressure

SESS: Scoring Procedures

9. Concentration

Factor 1: Coachability

11. Mental maturity

- 12. Competitive demeanor
- 13. Receptivity to coaching
- 15. Willingness to listen
- 16. Willingness to learn
- 17. Integrity
- 20. Trust
- 22. Honesty
- 24. Respect

Factor 2: Team player

- 1. Self discipline
- 3. Love of the sport
- 4. Team chemistry
- 6. Role acceptance
- 19. Communication
- 21. Being a hard worker
- 23. Leadership qualities

- 26. High aspirations

Factor 3: Physical Ability

- 2. Strength
- 7. Reaction time
- 10. Speed
- 14. Athleticism
- 25. Coordination
- 27. Agility

Factor 4: Maturity

- 5. Confidence level
- 18. Courage
- 28. Athletic experience
- 29. Ability to use good strategy
- 30. Making complete assessments