

Theoretical Orientation to Performance Excellence

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Introduction

Striving for performance excellence is paramount for athletes to achieve the pinnacles of their careers. In this paper I will discuss how performance excellence connects with self-determination theory (SDT) and positive psychology in the realm of sports. According to Cotterill et al. (2017) human functioning and psychological health is determined by the satisfaction of the individual's psychological needs for autonomy (the perception that one's actions are volitional), relatedness (the perception that actions are valued by social networks) and competence (the perception that one's actions are efficacious).

As we will see greater levels of motivation, greater levels of concentration, persistence on tasks, higher cognitive processing, and task engagement (Cotterill, 2017) have all been related to high levels of self-determination. All of these are building blocks to allow an athlete to work towards higher levels of performance. Positive psychology at its best (Biswas-Diener, 2010) is a coaching approach that has its focus on determining strengths and focusing on them without ignoring weaknesses, and that is grounded in and evolves with research. Positive psychology focuses on what is right and not on what is wrong with people, it furthers positive emotions that strengthen autonomous motivation and thereby it is said will improve performance.

Literature Review

According to Rocchi et al. (2020) athletes with self-determined motivation participate and train for more intrinsic reasons, they enjoy their sport and like mastering new skills and challenges. Athletes that have non-self-determined (controlled) motivation train and participate to win, to impress others or they may not even be sure why they participate. Self-determined motivation has been linked to wellbeing and improved performance. Rocchi et al. (2020)

followed the performance trajectories of competitive swimmers over seven seasons. Swimmers reported on their coaches' interpersonal behavior regarding all three elements of S DT, relatedness, competence, and autonomy. The athletes' own motivation and their performance were tracked, using the International Swimming Federation point system. Rocchi et al.'s (2020) study showed that autonomy supportive coaching showed higher overall performance as the groups in the Improvement and High-Performance trajectories reported higher autonomy support by their coaches and revealed higher self-determined motivation. It was assumed that this happened through in part providing feedback that allowed athletes to self-evaluate and make adjustments on their own. Swimmers who dropped out before the study ended in 2017 reported lower levels of perception of relatedness. Interestingly competence thwarting behavior did not show lower performance or earlier dropouts.

Gillet, Vallerand et al. (2013) investigated how positive and negative affect are related to autonomous and controlled motivation. Positive affect is a state that we aim for when using positive psychology. As per Biswas Diener's (2010) one of the five tenets of positive psychology, positivity, is a powerful resource for facilitating change and achieving success. Positive psychology coaching fits into this construct as such a coaching approach will support an athlete's need for autonomy, connectedness, and the perception of competence. The main tenet of positive psychology is the focus on an athlete's strength. ^{3.1} If we assess strengths and explore them with our athletes' and help them to continuously improve on those strengths, it should certainly leave an athlete feeling competent and display positive affect.

Their study, as performed in university students, showed that autonomous motivation leads to better performance and that amotivation leads to lower performance outcomes. Their

study also seems to indicate that controlled motivation leads to lower performance outcomes as we will see this is not the case in all the research that has been done over the last decade.

Carpentier's study (2013) has shown that the relationship between how change-oriented feedback is given to athletes, can either be motivating and lead to improved performance but it can at times also be demotivating and reduce an athlete's self-esteem. It was hypothesized that the type of change-oriented feedback was given was important. If autonomy supporting change feedback was given it was assumed that athlete wellbeing and performance would improve. According to Carpentier (2013) relatively few studies have looked at how coaches provide feedback to their athletes. Feedback is important for athletes for motivation, for increased focus and to understand what areas need improving on. How feedback is provided therefore needs to create a balance between focusing on an athlete's strengths by providing positive feedback (promotion-oriented feedback) and change oriented feedback that focuses on a particular weakness that may need working on. If this feedback can be conveyed in a manner that is perceived by the athlete to be autonomy supporting Carpentier's study (2013) shows that it can improve an athlete's wellbeing and performance. Providing such balanced feedback very much is in line with positive psychology coaching which focuses on strengths without ignoring parts of an athlete's performance that needs work.

As per Biswas-Diener (2010) how we as coaches provide feedback can influence an athlete's levels of motivation and positivity, hence we need to be clear as to what outcome we want from the feedback, ensuring that feedback is accurate and future orientated, specific, and it also needs to be tailored to the relationship between the coach and the individual. This brings us back around to the importance of the coach athlete relationship which is supported by self-determination theory and the fulfilment of basic psychological needs.

In Haerens' et al. study (2017) young athletes, from a wide variety of sports, who performed in selective school sports programs, reported on their coaches' motivational style. Apart from measuring the young athletes' need satisfaction outcomes, such as self-reported well-being and ill-being, coach reported athlete performance was also investigated. Coach rated performance was based on intra-individual progress and inter-individual performance. Four different types of coaching (motivational) styles were investigated a.) high autonomy support b.) high autonomy and high control, c.) low autonomy and low control and lastly d.) high control only.

More optimal outcomes were found in the high autonomy and high autonomy/high control groups. Whilst the high autonomy/high control group when compared to the high control group saw better outcomes performance-wise, there were also drawbacks to this when compared to the high autonomy only group. Performance outcomes were better however, when compared to the high autonomy only group there was more needs frustration identified and higher levels of non-participation (dropouts), which were comparable to the number of dropouts/non-participation in the high control only group. This seems to indicate that the more controlling practices can work well in a certain athletes, but it will put off other athletes from continuing to participate. High numbers of non-participation were not seen in the highly supportive autonomy group, where athletes also reported higher well-being scores.

Gillet and Lafreniere's study (2012) took a slightly different approach looking at performance related goals, goal attainment, autonomous and controlled coaching approaches and well-being. Unlike other studies by Gillet this one was performed in university students and not student athletes. One of the hypotheses of this study was that they expected to see a positive relation between autonomous motivation and, performance related goals and subsequent goal

attainment, which we could consider a positive performance. This hypothesis was found to be true and goals, goal attainment and autonomous motivation also related to psychological need satisfaction and ultimately well-being.

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Gillet and Berjot (2012) et al. investigated the relationship between different types of motivation and performance in two different studies: one with junior fencers and the second one in participants of the marathon du sable (ultra-distance running). Both are discussed in the same research paper. In both studies several different motivation clusters were identified; low cluster (moderate autonomous motivation, low controlled motivation and low amotivation), moderate cluster (moderate/high autonomous motivation, moderate controlled and low amotivation) and high cluster (high autonomous and controlled motivation and low amotivation).

The high cluster which showed both high levels of controlled and autonomous motivation related positively to high performance in the athletes, it also showed that athletes in this cluster were more emotionally and physically exhausted, however. This counters the belief that only autonomous motivation positively affects performance. A relationship between burnout and high levels of autonomous and controlled motivation had been shown in an older study by Ratelle et al. (2007). It is not discussed if this physical and mental exhaustion eventually had a detrimental effect on the athlete's performance, however it may be important to investigate in the future if simply having high levels of autonomous motivation without the connection with controlled motivation would also lead to symptoms of burnout if high performance were maintained over a long period of time.

As per Koka (2020) there is a paucity in studies still today relating to STD, motivation types, autonomy supportive or controlling behaviors and actual sports performance. They sought to address this in their study investigating coaching behaviors and performance in a team of

female aesthetic group gymnasts. In Koka's study using the framework of self-determination theory, they tested how the athletes' perception of the coaches' either autonomy supportive or controlling behavior affected their performance and the types of motivation they experienced. They found that autonomy supportive coach behavior, as perceived by the athletes, significantly improved the team's performance through the motivational variable (autonomous motivation). However, they also found that more controlling coaching behavior as perceived by the gymnasts did not lead to psychological needs frustration which is inconsistent with the tenets of SDT.

Conclusion

When it comes to investigating self-determination theory in relation to sports performance and positive psychology there are not yet many studies that have been performed and this needs to change over the coming years (Koka, 2020).

We can see that of the three tenets of SDT the link between autonomy supportive coaching and performance is the strongest and most investigated. In fact, only Rocchi et al. (2020) investigated competence and relatedness in relation to (sports) performance.

All studies showed that a higher perceived sense of autonomy supportive coaching and autonomous motivation lead to higher levels of performance which supports the use of self determination theory to improve performance.

Interestingly however both Gillet and Berjot (2012) and Haerens (2017) indicate that when controlled motivation or more controlled coaching behaviors are used in conjunction with autonomous behaviors and motivation the performance outcome is also high. These studies seem to indicate however that in these groups there is a higher number of drops outs and a higher level of athlete exhaustion. Furthermore, Carpentier's study (2013) shows us that how feedback is

given, an important tenet of positive psychology, and perceived relates to athlete performance, more autonomy supportive feedback leads to higher performance.

Gillet and Vallerand (2012) make an important point when they suggest that further research should look at how different athletes endorse different types of motivation and in my mind also different types of coach behavior and feedback. As we can see there is a subset of athletes who benefit from not only autonomy supportive coaching but a combination of controlled and autonomy supportive behaviors. Also, not every athlete will have the same perception of a coach's behavior and motivational style.

We can however see that overall, an approach that supports autonomy, delivers relevant feedback at the right time and that focuses on positive affect has a positive impact on athlete performance.

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Index of comments

- 2.1 No 'Introduction' header in APA 7. Re-state title, centered, and in bold.
- 3.1 Need citation to support.
- 4.1 Excellent applied implications.
- 6.1 The year should be listed after et al.
- 8.1 Excellent work on this final paper!