Creating a mastery-oriented performance climate – the role of a coach
Written by Frank Heggebo (Click for Author profile)

Motivational theories assume an individual as an intentional, goal-directed organism who operates in rational manners (Roberts, Treasure & Conroy, 2007). An individual participating in sports are consequently driven by motives related to winning (ego-orientation) and mastering of skills (task-orientation) (Roberts et al., 2007). These predisposed goal orientations affect an individual’s state of motivational-involvement in sport-context.

An ego-oriented athlete are constantly monitoring his performance related to others and is interested in winning with the smallest of efforts. Such dispositions are also more prone to withdraw form challenging situations where his/hers ability seems shortcoming (Nicholls, 1989; Roberts et al., 2007). A task-oriented individual will on the opposite side be more focused on mastering the task at hand and giving enough efforts in to this process. Task-oriented athletes’ are more likely to persist in the face of failure, puts in more effort, selects more likely challenging tasks and stays more motivated in the process of development (Roberts et al., 2007). The Achievement Goal-theory also suggests these different goal-orientations to be orthogonal – meaning they can be high or low in either or both (Nicholls, 1989). It is evident from elite-level athletes that this population provides high scores on both task and ego-orientation, giving them a wider range and possibility for motivation (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2001).

What motivational climate one operates in plays a major role in fostering goal-orientations (Nicholls, 1989; Roberts et al., 2007). Motivational climate being perceived as either mastery (task) or performance (ego) climates – are crucial situational determinants of behavior (Roberts et al., 2007). Mastery climate refers to performance-structures that revolves around supporting effort, cooperation and emphasis on individual/team development, learning and mastery of tasks. On the other hand, a performance climate are fostering normative comparison and intrateam competition. Coaches are more likely to punish mistakes and errors (Roberts et al., 2007). An interesting finding related to motivational climate – are elite level-athletes describing a mastery climate as one of the main reasons for individual and team success (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2001). Mastery climates coheres well with a more adaptive pattern like putting in effort, adherence to training, developing performance, well being, self-regulation and confidence among both elite athletes, physical education-classes and youth-sports. A mastery climate also reduces likeliness of maladaptive outcomes like anxiety, stress, burnout dimensions and drop out (Treasure, 2001; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2001; Lemyre, Treasure & Roberts, 2006).

So how should we go about when fostering a mastery oriented climate? Is it enough just to focus on task-development and efforts alone – or are there several factors which can help provide support of this climate? Epstein’s TARGET structures is a powerful tool for helping coaches create and enhance perception of the performance climate being mastery-oriented (Epstein, 1989). This model has also been adapted to sports environment by Roberts and Treasure in 1997.

**Task:** Focus constantly on learning and task involvement. Play down normative competition and social comparison – focus on learning and developing new skills.

**Authority:** Let athletes participate in decision-making processes. Let them give input on new drills, new ways to look at things to support their sense of participation and self-determination.
**Reward:** Reward improvement, progress and effort – individually and as a team. Try to avoid social comparison and public evaluative situations especially negative ones.

**Grouping:** Try and create cooperative learning climates within the groups in both individual and team sports. Have athletes cooperating together in trying to solve varying problems and challenges rather than competing each other at any cost.

**Evaluation:** Give a lot of evaluative feedback focusing around personal and team-improvement. Evaluate progress, development, the quality of the work-process – not just who is best at a given task.

**Timing:** Give athletes’ time enough to master and develop – do not send them home with “unfulfilled tasks”. It is important to provide feedback as immediately as possible after performance and focus on mastery of tasks and challenges. Time is also crucial for the coach to be able to implement the targets above.

This model could well be a framework for coaches to create better learning and developmental environment for their players and athletes – supporting their sense of that training and excelling into elite-level requires; quality in efforts and training hours, focus on your given tasks, cooperation with your coach and fellow-athletes, developing your ability in decision-making and self-regulation.

When creating a mastery climate – the athletes gets the idea that training and efforts matter. They get the idea that winning is not the only way to develop – what if you won, but performed worse? A systematically approach to this aspect will indeed be beneficial for athletes and coaches at competitive and noncompetitive levels. And remember – even the best athletes develops and performs best when perceiving the performance environment as a mastery climate!

**References:**


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