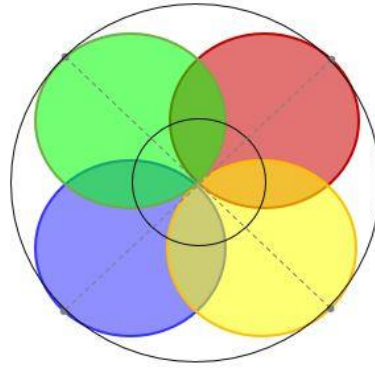**Blended Intelligence**
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Communities of Practise: Situated Learning

Legitimate peripheral participation is the engagement in a social practise that entails learning as an integral constituent (Cassidy & Rossi 2006; Mallet 2010). Coaching is well documented in the literature as being an interpersonal, social pursuit in which knowledge is passed between athlete and coach. Understanding coaching expertise (Cote 2006) and tracking a coach's education is a question that research struggles to answer because of the 'murky low lands' in which coaches operate (Gilbert, Cote & Mallett 2006). In the following essay we will critique the community of practise (CoP) and its place in developing coach expertise. To do this effectively, we should first frame the coaches underpinning knowledge (Cote 2006).

The literature suggests that successful coaches tend to have a tertiary education (Gilbert et al 2006), they will have participated in the sport in which they coach for no less than 5 years and will have likely been an assistant or neophyte coach operating under a head coach. In a coaches early years they will actively engage in formal coach education to gain credibility (Cote 2006) but as they develop their expertise through practise they value observing other coaches, discussions with peers and actively seeking out solutions to problems by themselves. When we consider the thousands of hours of sports participation and coaching

practise that a coach accrues, it becomes obvious that coach education courses are a poor platform for developing coaching knowledge (Culver & Trudel 2006; Cushion, Armour & Jones 2003) and that expertise is acquired through doing. How then does a coach develop the threshold knowledge that is required to be accepted into a coaching fraternity?

It is acknowledged that an apprenticeship (Cassidy & Rossi 2006), where learning is situated on the job is a powerful way to enhance the learning experience. Mentoring is a useful tool to guide the mentee through indoctrination into the specialist group. A well-managed mentoring programme (Jones, Harris & Miles 2009) can bridge the gap between sought after formal education and the practical and vocational skills that are required. Jones et al (2009) review the characteristics of successful mentoring programmes that exist in business, nursing and education suggesting that a similar model could be adopted in sport. The idea that novices can learn from peers in their workplace is not new (Culver & Trudel 2008). Rynne, Mallett and Tinning (2006) suggested that institutes of sport are excellent sites for learning and that coach education ill prepares coaches to function in elite sport. Perhaps then, apprenticeships, mentoring and a community of practise (Wenger & Snyder 2000) will help facilitate the transition into the elite environment.

A community of practise (CoP) is defined by Lave & Wenger as a *"group of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis."*

Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004, p172

There are 3 ways in which an individual can belong to a social learning system, imagination, alignment and belonging. To gain full membership into the CoP members must be mutually engaged, have joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (Culver & Trudel 2006; Galipeau & Trudel 2006).

Initial access to the CoP requires a basic skill set, base level knowledge so that the coach can operate effectively, communicate and share ideas. Formal education, professional qualifications, practical ability and coaching experience are all pre-requisites. Without these, there would be limited sense of belonging but more importantly, limited ability to comprehend the problems and issues the group face. CoP's need a framework to function and community members with breadth and depth of knowledge (Culver & Trudel 2006), without these, the group will lack purpose, understanding and may disintegrate. On initial entry to the group the mentee is guided through ways of working process, specialist vocabulary and is inducted into the environment. The mentor plays a significant role in guiding learning (Jones et al 2009) and encouraging reflection on action (Cushion 2006) however, all members of the CoP will share their expertise, experience and knowledge, which the mentee will absorb and gain from.

Over time, the novice/mentee's knowledge and expertise develops from that of an observer within the group to a fully functioning member. At this point, they will contribute to the direction of the CoP and will develop respect and standing within the group. They still require the mentor to discuss issues, help solve problems, give direction and guidance. In some cases, the mentor may not be best placed to give advice or provide direction. Politics, perceived power in the group, conflict and differences of opinions can be present in a CoP

or between CoP's (constellations). The knowledge passed on by the mentor can at times be strongly shaped by their experiences rather than on good practise (Jones et al 2009). Caution must be displayed by the mentee so as not to alienate themselves from the community by disagreeing with practices but as their position becomes fixed, there opinion may be sought out.

When elder members within the group move on, the CoP can become directionless. If existing members do not step up, the group can disperse seeking out information from new sources or relying heavily on old practices. Networks of Practise (NoP) and Informal Knowledge Networks (IKN's) provide very useful sources of knowledge to the coach. They have access to other professionals operating within their industry, reams of information through the internet (social networks), in books and from other professionals (bio-mechanist/engineering) who can provide solutions to coaching problems in an abstract way. The CoP member can offer this information to the group after it has been applied and reflected upon (Gilbert & Trudel 2006). The CCoP is where relevant experience, skills and solutions can be captured, stored, discussed then shared or passed on.

Summary:

- Access into the CoP requires pre-requisite knowledge that is developed through formal education (understanding), basic professional qualifications (appropriate base level skills), practical knowledge (vocational skills) and some applied experience (coaching). This base knowledge allows new members to function.

- The mentor is important in showing the mentee the ropes, indoctrinating them into the CoP and inducting them into the organisation. Mentors have responsibility to

the mentee and must ensure that they remain impartial and develop understanding rather than doing skills.

- As the mentee serves their apprenticeship, they develop knowledge and expertise through situated learning and reflection. With this knowledge becomes a better standing within the CoP and a larger contribution to its functions.

- The CoP allows new members to engage with and understand the community ways of working. It gives members a blue print way of operating, allows them to share ideas and a strong mechanism for internal quality assurance.

- The CoP can replicate the ideas and philosophes of its strongest members/elders. Where there is politics, conflict, historical baggage, new members of the CoP can inherit this and this can limit the agency of the group.

- The individual member may never fully belong to the CoP if they are limited in self-confidence, have a fear of showing thier lack of knowledge, have interpersonal issues with other members of the group or create conflict by not adopting the CoPs beliefs.

- Some ideas for the development of a CCoP. Running a 'coaches corner' or practitioner 'focus' agenda where practitioners/coaches share problems (through video, mini presentations on programmes and research abstracts) or by participation of coaches from other sports, professions or specialist practitioners to enhance our knowledge and challenge our thinking. This provides a strong vehicle for sharing practise and learning from colleagues.

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