

Empowering Paddlers

Doug Cooper looks at how to create an optimum learning and performance environment...

WHEN COACHING, performing or learning have you ever stopped and considered the interpersonal environment that is being created. Is it supportive, is it inspiring, is it empathetic, does it motivate? What do you value about the environment you create as a coach or that you operate best in when learning and performing?

Perhaps reflect back to a positive learning experience when you were being coached – I bet it wasn't 'what' the coach knew that made it so positive, it was possibly all about the environment they created to support you as a learner. When considering this, the interpersonal environment we create as a coach is perhaps the 'glue' that holds the coaching process together; thus the critical element for successful coaching.

To understand how to create an optimum environment for our learners we need to think about their motivations and how our social interactions impact on these. There are two recognised and well-researched ways of looking at these:

● Motivational Goals

People are motivated by the goals they set or are set for them; these goals can be categorised in two ways depending on the motivations they support. What type of goals do you set yourself and/or your learners? Can you see pros or cons of the type of goals in Figure 1?

● Basic Human Motivational Needs

To support any learning, performing or goal achievement, there are some basic human psychological needs to be met that support an optimum interpersonal environment. Can you relate to these needs shown in Figure 2? Have you experienced when they are all in place, or when they were not in place – how did that make you feel as a learner/performer?

An Empowering Motivational Climate

There is an increasing amount of research in the paddlesport and adventure sports coaching world at the moment. From this it is being suggested that as coaches we want to create independent learners/performers and decision-makers, and as coaches and performers we focus on and perform best when our motivational goals are mastery/task based. How does this fit with your coaching beliefs and in your world of coaching/performing?

If wanting to achieve the above then an optimum motivational climate for us to consider creating in order to support learning and performance is perhaps an empowering one. The essence behind this climate is to develop self-reliance and decision-making in our learners/performers, and in recent research it appears this is exactly what expert adventure sports coaches do.

● How do we create this empowering motivational climate?

To create this climate we need to consider the basic human motivational needs, along with supporting and promoting goals that are mastery/task focused.



For us to be able to do this as coaches we need to be aware of four key aspects that make up this empowering motivational climate, and then ensure that our coaching behaviours support and promote them. They are as follows:

Autonomy-supportive

To support a learner/performer's autonomy within the environment we create, as coaches we need to:

- Provide opportunity for learner input
- Provide rationale for tasks
- Encourage intrinsic interest
- Provide meaningful choice
- Acknowledge feelings and perspective

Mastery/task-involving

To support and promote a learner/performer win master/task based goals, as coaches we need to:

- Emphasise mastery/task-focused competence feedback

Figure 1

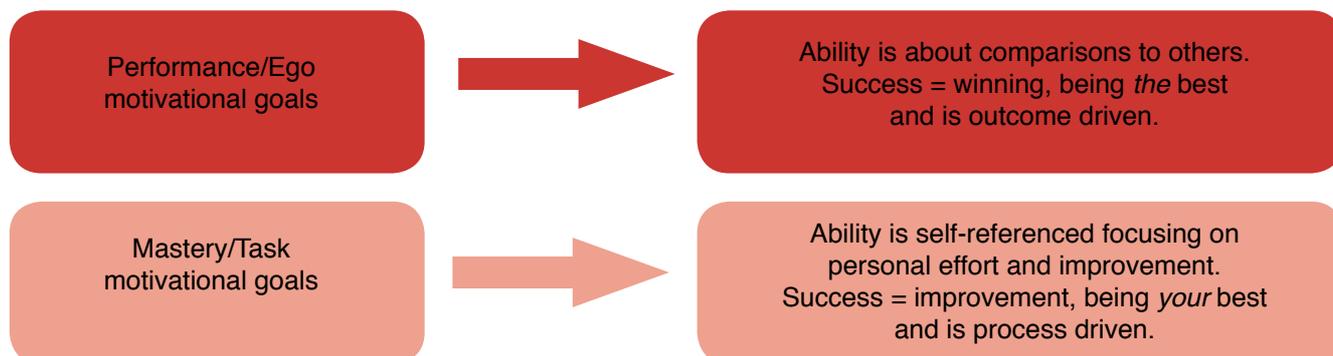
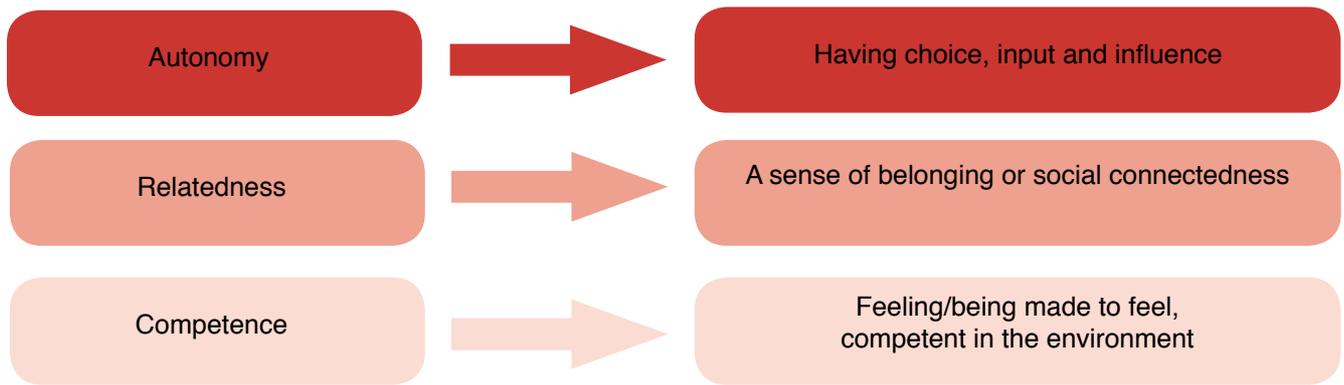


Figure 2



- Emphasise and recognise effort and/or improvement
- Use co-operative learning

Relatedness-supportive

To ensure our learners/performers feel a sense of belonging and social connectedness, as coaches we need to:

- Adopt a warm communication style
- Ensure all learners/performers are included in drills, activities or exercises
- Show care and concern for our learners/performers

Structure

To ensure our learners/performers feel confident that they are going to be supported in an empowering way, then as coaches we need to have structure in what we do and:

- Provide guidance through our drills, activities or exercises
- Provide instruction and organisation
- Offer expectations for learning

Coaching is a complex social process that is complicated and messy! However, the 'glue' that perhaps holds it together is the interpersonal environment that we create, support and foster as a coach – the motivational climate.

In our world of paddlesport coaching, our learners/performers are driven by the desire to become independent in what they do and be able to make decisions for themselves. The reasons they paddle and the goals they set are often focused on personal effort and improvement, wanting to achieve for personal satisfaction more often than not. When coaching it is the climate we create to support this that is critical, perhaps even the make or break of the learning/performance experience.

Creating an empowering motivational climate is perhaps an optimal way to support our learners, by simply considering how we go about this has the potential to have a huge impact on our coaching, and more importantly for our learners/performers. The question is: "How empowering are you as a coach?"

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