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Coach – Coaching

1. The work of the coach	2
2. The coaching of training sessions	8
3. The coaching team	13
4. Coaching young players: the dual role of coach and educator	16

Behind every great team that achieves results, produces quality football and plays an entertaining game, you will find a manager or coach with a charismatic personality, who is frequently an emblematic figure within his club or country (a Beckenbauer, Cruyff, Ferguson, Hitzfeld, Jacquet, Lippi, Platini, Parreira, Roux, Trapattoni or Zagalo).

There is no specific programme at youth level aimed at achieving high-quality performances or at changing the behaviour of a player without the full involvement of a coach or recognised instructor, such as Pekerman (Argentina), Pua (Uruguay), Queiroz (Portugal), Suaudeau (France), or other educators working in the background.

This function, which nowadays involves not only sports-related aspects, but also psychological and pedagogical ones, has expanded considerably in football, in particular to cope with the increasing demands of the modern game and the players. In addition to organisational and scheduling tasks, and the supervision of technical, tactical and physical aspects, the coach's area of activity and responsibilities have now been extended to include communication, day-to-day team management, health and hygiene issues concerning the players, as well as their training and education – not to mention dealings with the media for those coaches working at the highest level.

In the top clubs, the function of the coach has been extended still further to include administrative management of the team, even of the club itself, with major tasks involved, such as financial management, transfers and players' contracts, promoting the club, relations with external institutions, as well as determining the club structure. This work of the coach equates him with the CEO of a company, and involves responsibilities that go way beyond mere football knowledge.

Faced with the scope of and responsibility involved with his function, as well as the diversity of his activities, the coach is obliged to work as part of a team (**the coaching team**) with staff who are specialised in their particular area. This new form of coaching, based on teamwork and on communication, reinforces the leadership function of the coach still further in his role of head coach, "boss", "guvnor" or "gaffer", as he is sometimes known in the English-speaking world.

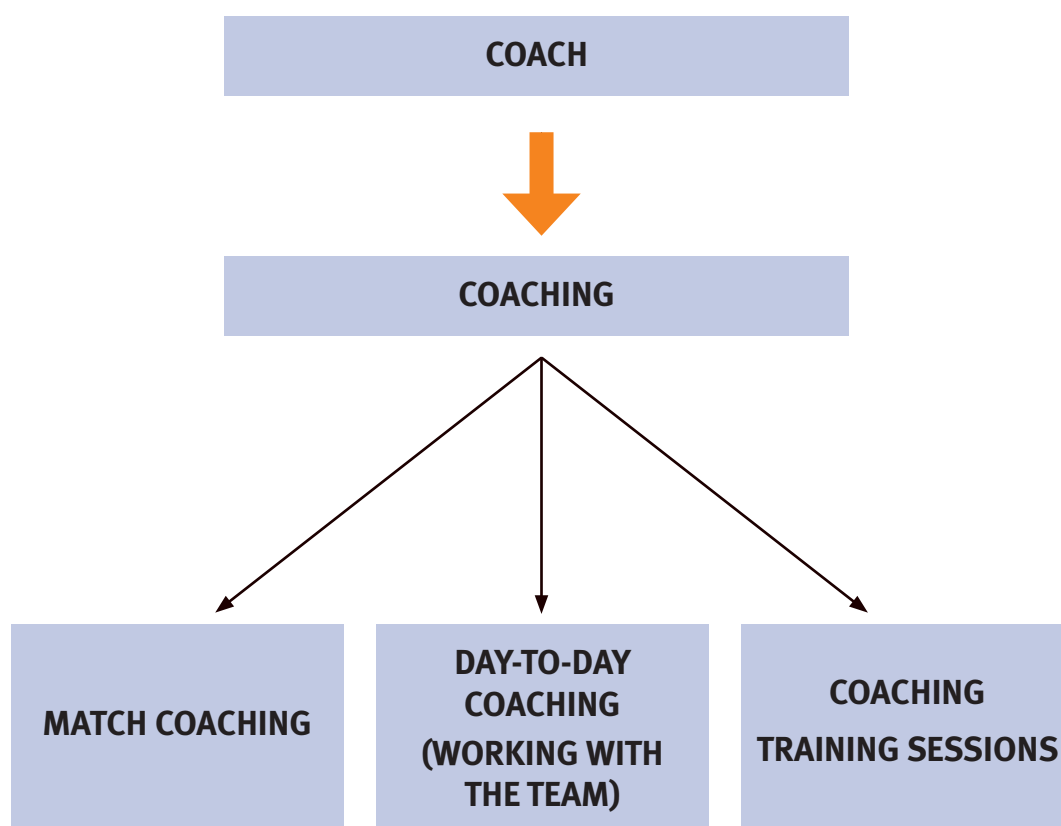
It is a difficult and complex profession, but also an exciting and extremely varied one by virtue of the educative and creative activities that it involves, as well as the innovations that constantly have to be considered.

This chapter on **coaching** is presented in four parts:

1. The work of the coach
2. Coaching of training sessions
3. The coaching team
4. Coaching of young players

"The better a coach knows his job and the better he masters that job, the more he will gain the understanding and respect of the players."

1. The work of the coach



Definitions

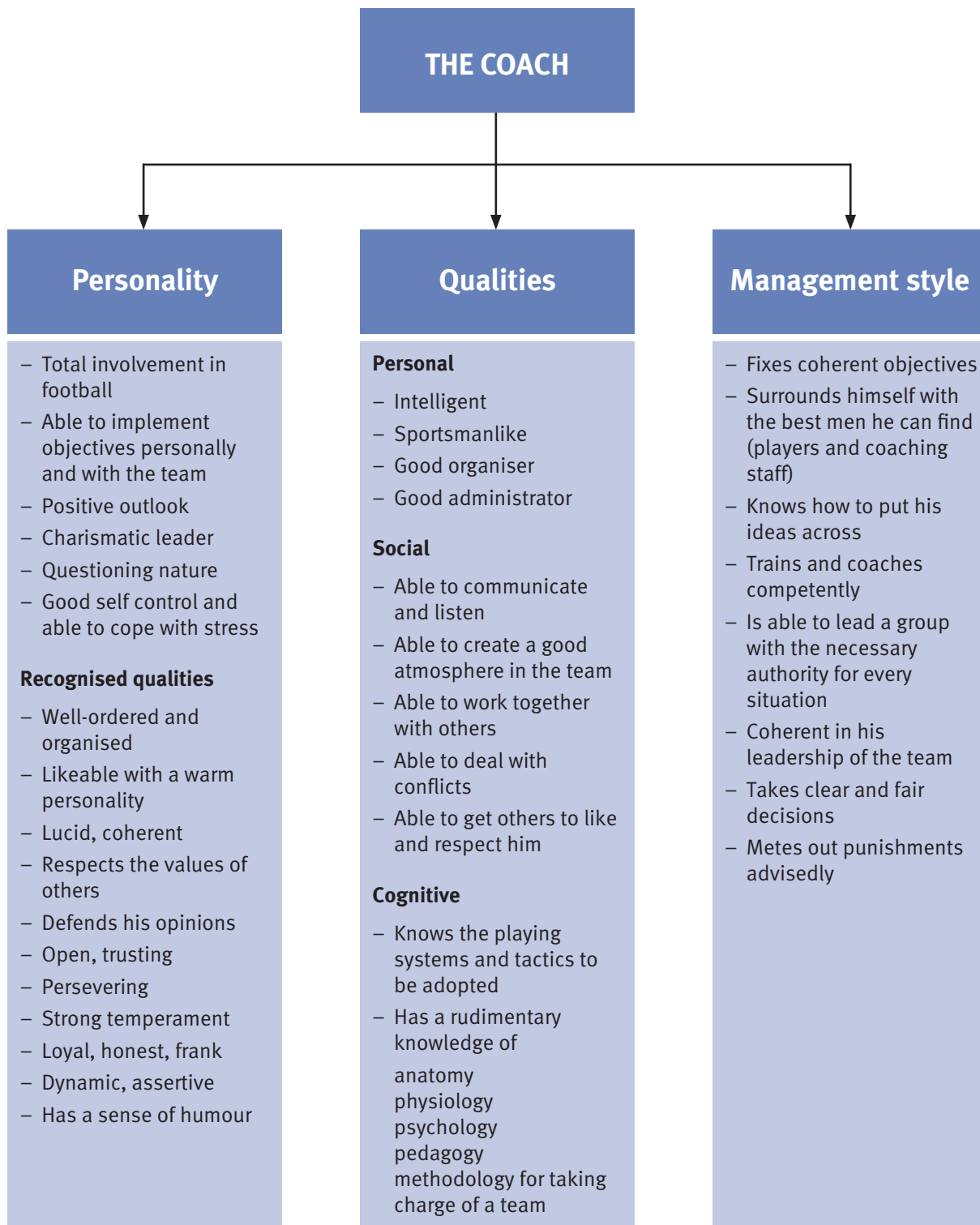
Coach: The person who takes care of the coaching and training of a team and who prepares them for performance, i.e. to achieve results. The coach is a specialist in technical and tactical training and in psychological and physical development. His tasks may also be extended, depending on his particular skills.

Coaching: The term covers everything involved in the work of the coach: training and developing, directing, advising and correcting players and helping them to progress. Good coaching relies on an in-depth knowledge of psychology and pedagogy; its aim is to optimise the performance of the team and to develop the full potential of each player.

Manager: The manager is responsible for managing and organising the club in such a way that the agreed operational objectives are achieved. In addition, he is responsible for the performances of the team and must account for his actions to the club's directors/senior management.

The person who carries out the function of team manager must have an excellent educational background as a coach and as an administrative manager, with solid coaching experience. To exercise the dual function of coach and team manager, the experience and knowledge acquired as a player are far from adequate. In certain clubs, a single person may combine the function of manager and coach.

Figure 1



Things that you as a coach should strive NOT to be

- ***concerning your willingness to listen to others***
 - You must not display a general lack of interest in other people and show little willingness to listen to the personal and psychological problems of others.
 - You must not feel ill at ease in your position as an “agony aunt/mentor”.
- ***concerning your attitude of open-mindedness***
 - You must not be afraid of change or wary of innovations.
 - You must not harbour doubts about yourself after a series of defeats or in conflict situations.
 - You must remain open to all constructive proposals.
- ***concerning your time management***
 - You must not be too preoccupied by football.
 - You must not have too little time available to improve yourself and widen your knowledge.
 - You must not have too little time available for yourself.
- ***concerning the reinforcement of your ideas and opinions (external feedback)***
 - You must not give too little or no encouragement, or praise too little or not at all (in particular with young players).
 - You must ensure that you give positive feedback as well.
 - You must not show a tendency to generalise too much.

General tasks of the coach or trainer

- Training and preparation of the team
- Organisation
- Communication
 - Internal (within the team)
 - External (outside of the team and the club, etc.)
- Monitoring and supervising
- Recruitment (scouting)
- Match coaching and coaching of training sessions
- Working with the team (on a day-to-day basis)

Coaching on a day-to-day basis (working with the team)

(involvement in technical meetings, medical meetings, club meetings, meetings with individuals)

Tasks

- To create a good working atmosphere and be willing to listen and seek solutions.
- To communicate with the media.
- To maintain contact with senior officials of the club, sports bodies, supporters, educational establishments, parents of young players and those supervising their training schemes.
- To speak with the players, either individually or collectively.
- To conduct the training sessions.
- To plan the match preparations.

Match coaching

Tasks

• *In the days preceding the match*

- Plan the match preparations.
- Decide on the team's travel arrangements and possible overnight stays.
- Ascertain the state (physical and psychological) of the players (through individual discussions).
- Pick the team, taking into account any restrictions imposed.
- Analyse the opponents (using videos).
- Pay close attention to team spirit.

• *On the day of the match*

- Bring the team together for a pre-match gathering (having fixed the time, place, duration and number of participants in advance).
 - › Remind everyone present of individual and collective instructions.
 - › Announce the final team selection.
 - › Give a brief presentation of the opposition: its strengths and weaknesses. (this can be done during the week before the match as well)
 - › Take into account weather conditions and the state of the pitch.
 - › Be aware of the influence of the opposing supporters (the “12th player”).
 - › Provide information about the referee.
 - › Motivate the team, and in particular certain players.
 - › Remind the players of the importance of a good warm-up.
- It is now common practice to hold a “wake-up” session (for physical and mental wake-up) on the morning of the match.
- It is important to stress here that the objective of a pre-match team meeting is not to fill the players' heads with a lot of words. If a team meeting is to serve its purpose effectively, the instructions given to the players must be both concise and precise. Talking too much has a detrimental effect.
- Remember the maxim that “small is beautiful”.

• *At half-time*

- You should establish a calm atmosphere in the dressing room, which is conducive to recovery.
- You should emphasise concisely the important aspects that need to be altered or rectified on the basis of notes taken during the first half, especially tactical elements and individual errors.
- You should not place too much emphasis on what has happened in the 1st half; what is done is done. But, if necessary, you should:
 - › Change certain tactical arrangements.
 - › Change the game plan.
 - › Change the team line-up by substituting a player.
 - › Give simple, clear, brief and precise instructions.
 - › Emphasise the positive aspects.
 - › Stimulate the players' willpower and their confidence.
 - › Encourage and motivate.
 - › Demand greater discipline.
- You should address the players by their first names.
- You should behave in such a way that every player feels involved – including the substitutes.
- You should be confident, reassuring and convincing.

Please note!

As the time available during the half-time interval is very short, only essential points should be raised. The players must return to the pitch with a clear knowledge of what they have to do and not having to ask themselves questions.

All of the tactical situations envisaged for the match or changes in the game plan that are introduced at half time must have been worked on in advance on the training field.

• At the end of the match

- You should not make a lot of comments immediately after the match has finished; no team meetings should be scheduled at this time (players are too tired, too nervous and too emotional).
- You should speak in a positive manner.
- If the team has lost, you should remain in control of the situation, seek support from your fellow coaching staff before facing the press and the senior management/directors. You should not look for excuses, criticise the players, the referee or the crowd.
- You should assume your responsibilities.

• At the post-match team meeting (on the day after the match)

- A meeting should be held with all the players in a quiet location – if possible a neutral one.
 - › Give your impressions and your assessment.
 - › Encourage the players to think about their own actions.
 - › Draw your own consequences and try to seek solutions.
 - › Ask the opinion of the players (this is a way of giving them a feeling of responsibility).
- At the end of the meeting, anyone who wishes to put forward constructive criticism may do so. The players should leave, knowing:
 - › the key points and objectives to be improved upon, both individually and collectively (with work on mental approach and technical and tactical aspects), and what practical measures are required to achieve this;
 - › what they can improve themselves.
- Match analysis by video is highly recommended, as this proves particularly fulfilling for the players.
- Depending on the importance of the points on the agenda, and if the team has lost, this post-match meeting may be split into two sessions:
 - › On the day after the match: the coach's impressions and possibly the steps to be taken to eliminate the shortcomings.
 - › Two days after the match: how to tackle the next match
- If there is any personal criticism to be meted out (in a private meeting), find fault with the player and not with the person. If it is considered necessary, this could be done with the rest of the team.

“A coach must be able to convince the players of the strategies and tactics to be adopted. And he can convince them, precisely because he does have such strategies and tactics.”

Figure 2: The range of skills of today' multi-faceted coaches



2. The coaching of training sessions

Coaching on the pitch takes up the lion's share of the time that the coach spends with the players.

During training sessions, the pitch is comparable to the stage in the theatre, a special place where THE SPECTACLE is rehearsed. It is therefore a place for intensive work where the players acquire the specific football-related skills that are necessary for them to progress in their careers.

The training session is all part of an educational process. **Training is learning to practise and to correct one's mistakes**, irrespective of the level of the player or the experience that he might have. There are always phases of training that involve learning (acquiring new technical and tactical skills or developing tactical situations to use against a given opponent). For this reason, it is important that training retains its effectiveness by:

- written preparation of the contents and organisation of the training session
- use of methodological principles
- emphasis on the coach-player-team relationship
- the manner in which the coach runs the session
- the quality of the coaching itself

The preparation and organisation of the session

Aspects to be taken into account

- the objectives of training
- the choice of the type of session (predominantly technical, combined technical and tactical, or physical)
- the structure of the session (the three phases)
- the selection of learning methods (total or analytical) and training methods (continuous, interval, circuit, etc.)
- seeking the optimum exertion-rest ratio
- adapting of the session to meet individual requirements
- the choice of material and equipment
- organisation and preparation of the training pitch
- assessment and monitoring of what has been achieved

How the session is run

This will depend on the leadership style of the coach and the extent to which and the manner in which he chooses to become involved. The role of the coach can be equated to that of the theatre director, who guides, observes, advises, listens, demonstrates, reinforces, decides, etc.

The educational objective of the session

“Give the players training and learning activities that are aimed at improving the skills and qualities that they need for the game and ensure that a sufficiently high rate of success is achieved with these.”

Michel Ritschard, 1982

This means that in every drill and every game situation practised, the players must be efficient, both mentally and physically.

For example: A three-player game drill working on crosses from the wings cannot be successful unless the crosses are accurate.

Figure 3: The conditions required to ensure the commitment of the players and the success of the activity

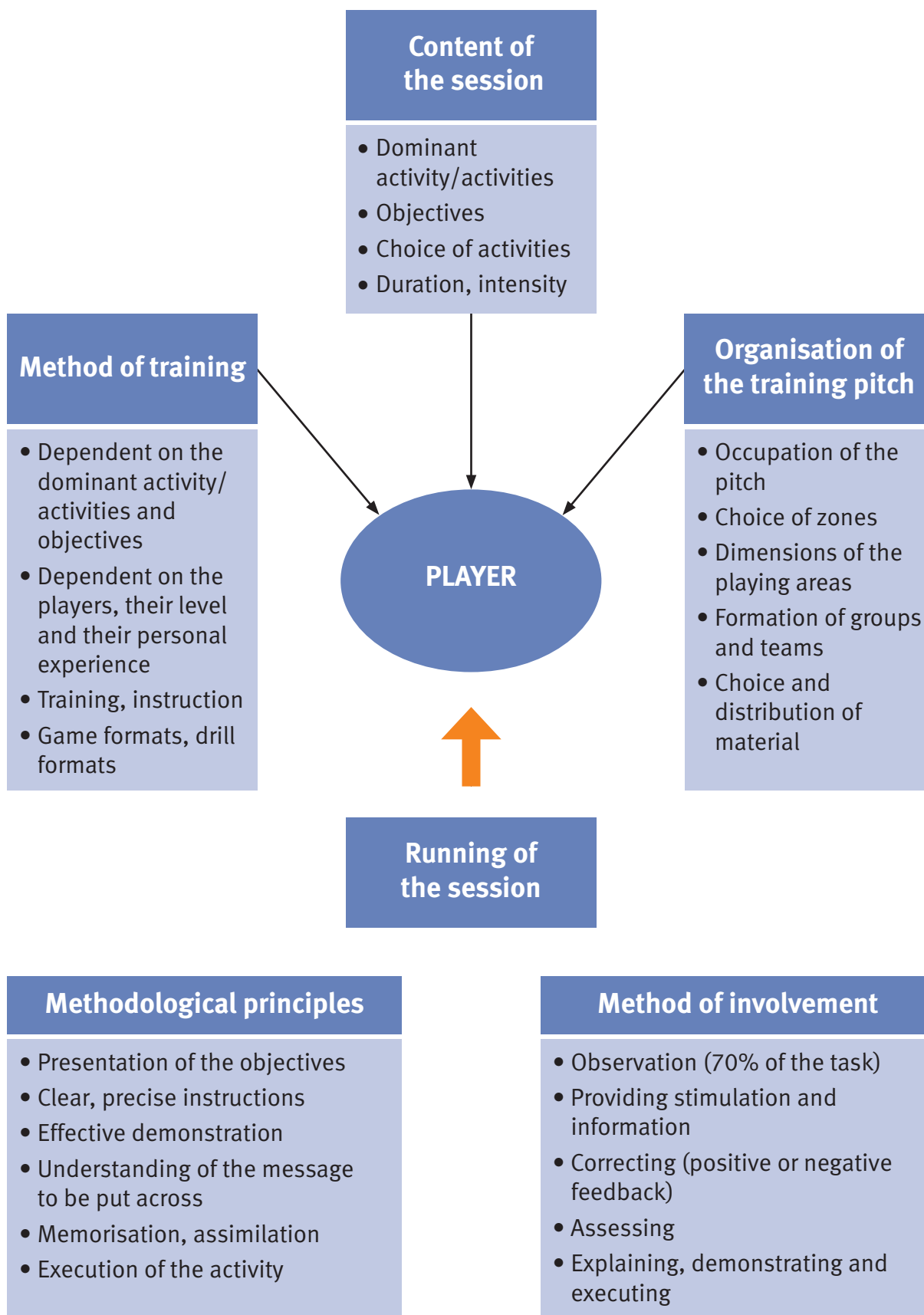
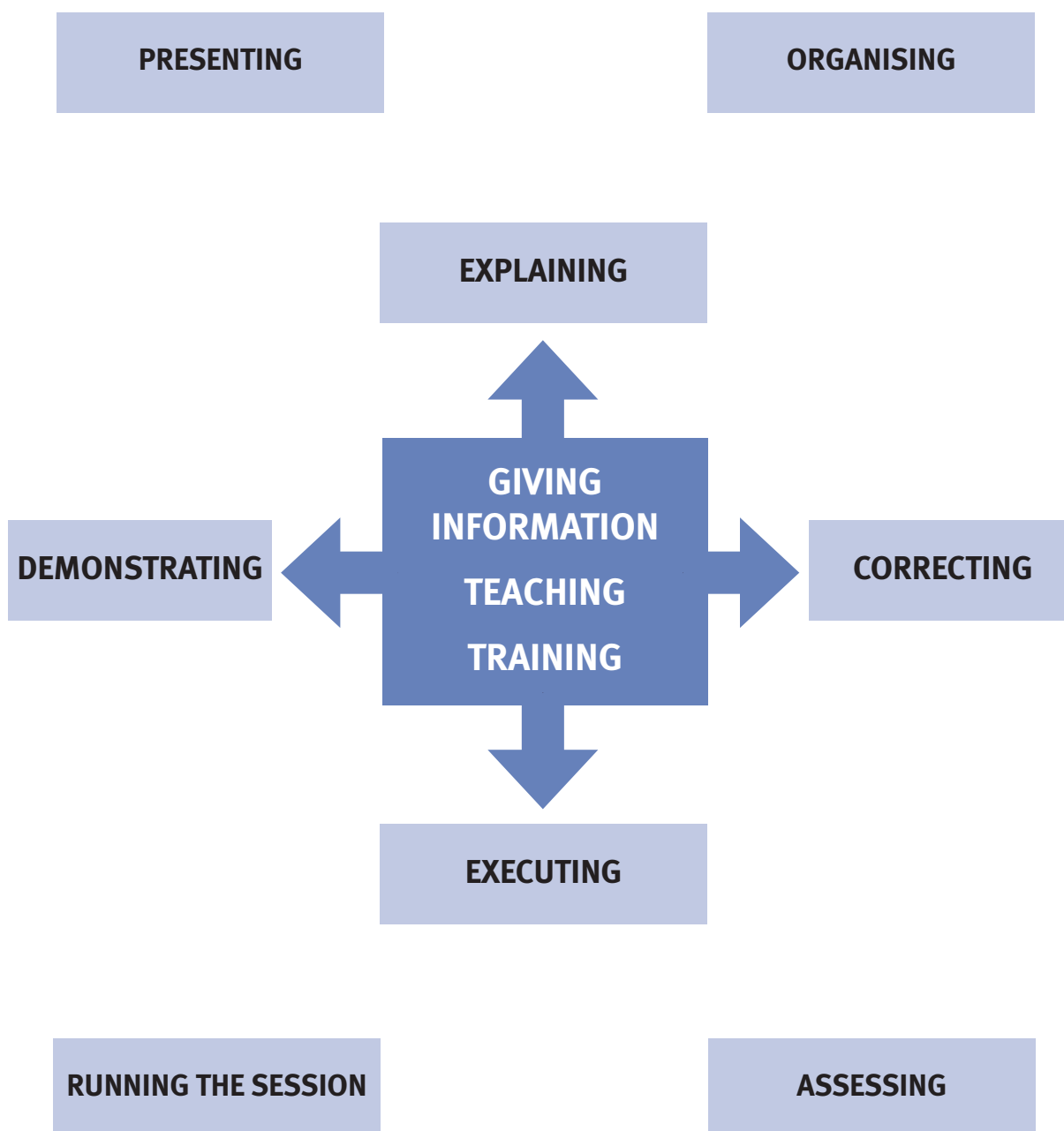


Figure 4: The eight fundamental actions involved in running a training session



Some key points to help with correction

• *How the coach should behave*

- Be attentive
- Concentrate on the objective(s) selected
For example: If the objective is to work on the team's defensive game, the coach must focus his corrections on defensive work only.
- Go onto the pitch (where the action is happening)
- Lead the action and motivate the players
- Observe
- Stimulate
- Correct

• *Coaching*

- When and how should you intervene? (by taking an overall view of the action and then a specific one)
- At what moment should you come in to correct? (immediately, or after an observation period?)
- What form should the correction take?
 - › words
 - › gestures
 - › direct involvement
- Approach the player(s) and
 - › remind him/them of the objective that has been fixed
 - › highlight the problem(s)
 - › question the player(s), and listen to him/them
 - › encourage co-operation
- Repeat the explanation, the demonstration and the execution of the training activity (combination, game or drill)

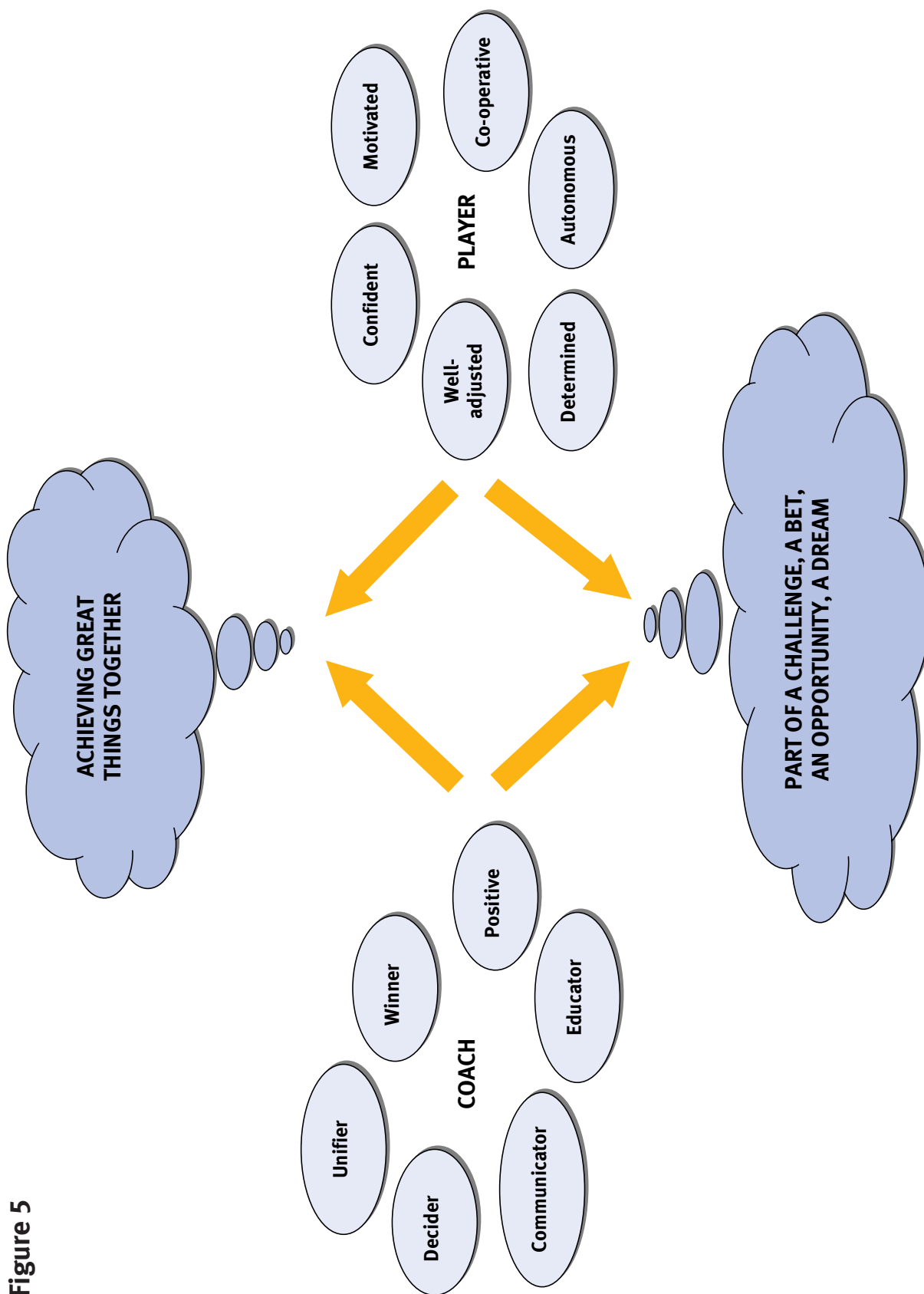
• *Correction*

- Do not highlight too many mistakes at the same time.
- Focus on the essential (i.e. what can bring about immediate success).
- Do not be aggressive, especially during drills where players are working on psychomotor skills (TECHNICAL).
- Address the whole team or the player(s) concerned.
- Be convincing, fair and precise.
- Give positive reinforcement.
- Inspire confidence by being persuasive.
- Vary the tone of your voice when giving your feedback.
- Encourage internal feedback (self-assessment on the part of the player)
- Take inspiration from the saying “Small is beautiful”

“The key to achieving a high-quality training session, a positive frame of mind and success with the activities lies in the **hands and the heart of the coach.**”

The running of any training session calls for improvisation and imagination.

Figure 5

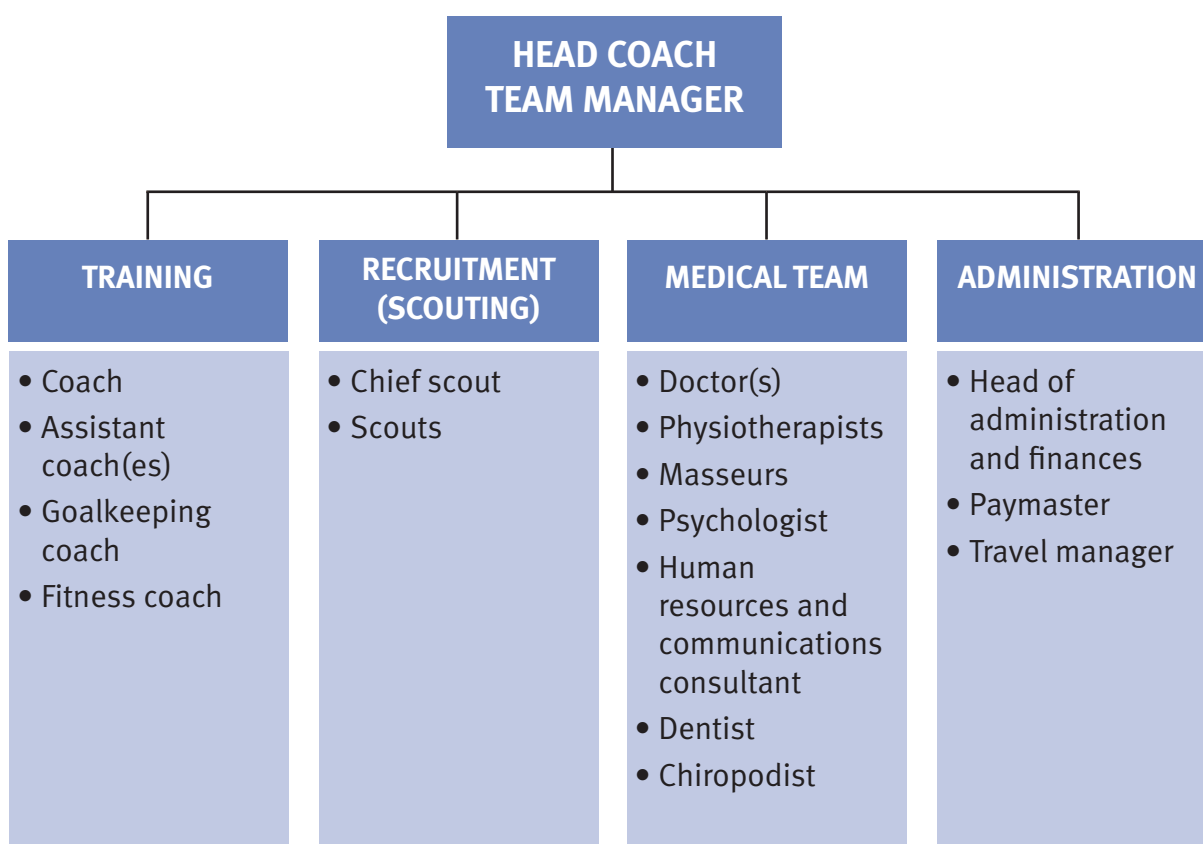


3. The coaching team

The increasingly numerous and complex tasks which the coach now has to fulfil and the constantly growing expectations on the part of players have given rise to the notion of the “technical staff” or “**coaching team**”. The vast majority of professional teams, if not all of them, operate nowadays with a technical staff.

Bringing together a group of people who are specialised in their particular field to work together with the coach can have a direct influence on the players, both individually and collectively.

A coaching team model



In this optimum coaching team model, all the people have a more or less direct influence on competition-related factors and performance.

This support staff in the different sectors is proving essential for clubs if they are to optimise their chance of success on a footballing level. However, the number of persons recruited depends on the club, the prestige of the team, the level of competition, the objectives sought and, of course, the cost in financial terms that such an organisational set-up involves.

Nowadays, it is very common to see three or four coaches conducting training sessions, each with a precise role: the head coach, the assistant coach, the fitness coach and the goalkeeping coach.

This has, of course, led to a better approach towards the whole training process, greater vision as far as the decisions that need to be taken are concerned, better management of the team and the players, and infinitely less pressure on the shoulders of the head coach.

Even though the coaching team set-up is based on the principle of group work, the main coach or head coach is still the central figure around whom all the operations and decision-making processes revolve.

While there are considerable and undisputable advantages to working in a group, it should also be pointed out that the functioning of a group is not always straightforward, especially when

- the head coach is not actively involved in the activities of his colleagues or partners;
- the definition of tasks is not clear;
- the competence of the people who have been recruited is called into question;
- there is a disagreement in the choice of objectives, of a policy to be adopted or in the game plan;
- communication between the head coach, the different sectors of the coaching team and the staff goes in only one direction;
- one of the coaches is attempting to take over from the head coach.

“Knowing how to give orders also means knowing how to surround yourself with competent and honest people, who are willing to give their all for the success of the club without counting the cost.”

The coaching team’s technical meeting

In practice, it is not possible to imagine a coaching team functioning in an optimal manner without real teamwork and a precise *modus operandi*. This involves at least one weekly technical meeting to allow them to plan together the work that has to be accomplished.

As a general rule, the weekly meeting is held at the beginning of the week. It starts with analysis of the most recent match and by a presentation of the next opponent; it then continues with the assessment phase: a quick appraisal of the football activity, the individual state of the players and the situation of injured players. After this, the work-related goals are defined; the training programme is also fixed right down to the smallest detail. Thereafter, each person is aware of his tasks and his work schedule. Final clarification is then agreed again before each training session with the persons directly concerned.

One of the great advantages of working with a coaching team is that supervision of the team can be optimised: the individual members of the team are more readily available for the players, and there is better communication between the different partners.

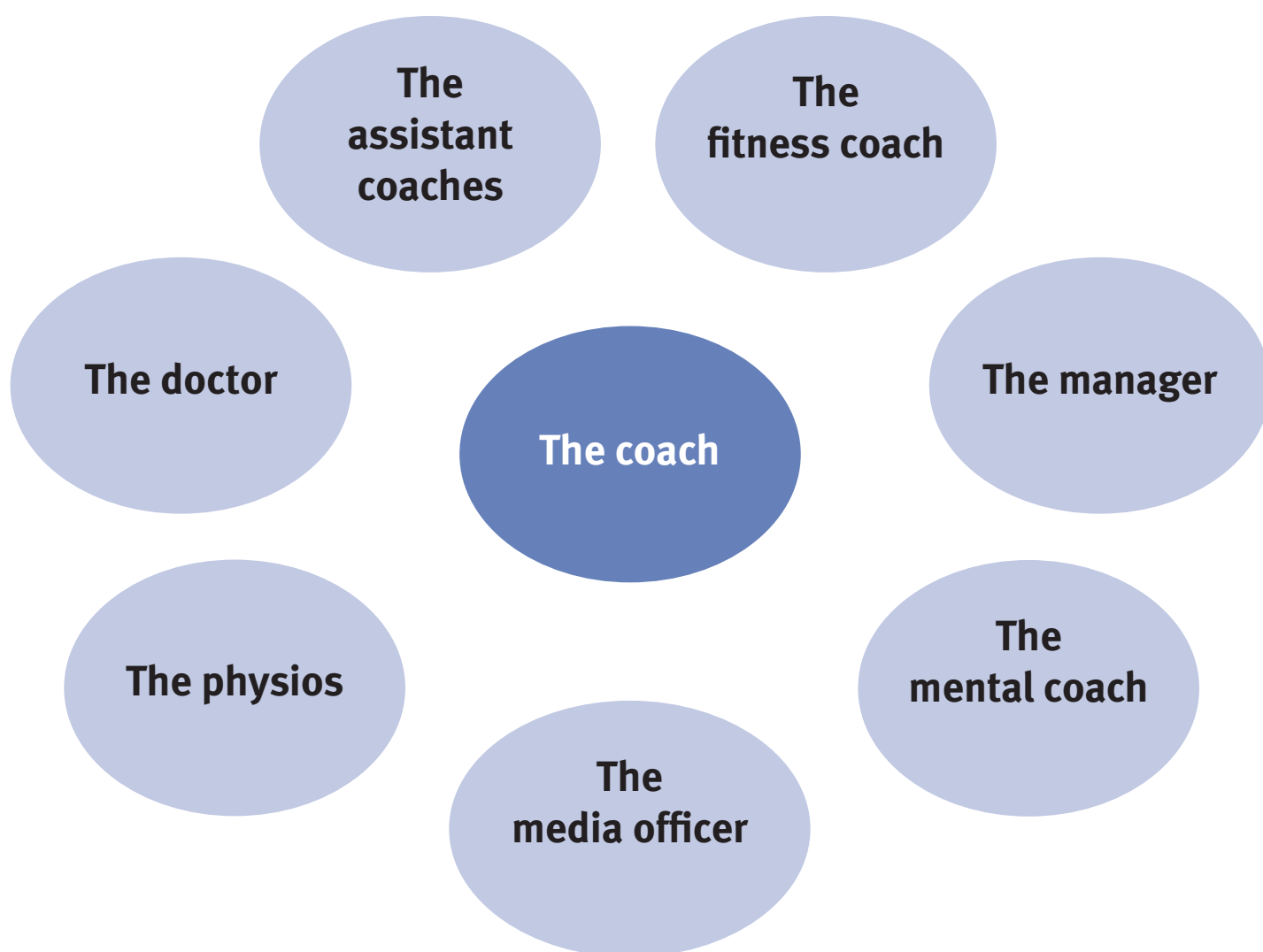
Above all, the strength of a coaching team depends on the atmosphere in the group, on the feeling of belonging within the group, as well as on the trust and respect between the constituent staff members. And it is the task of the leader, in this case the head coach, to create a healthy and friendly atmosphere.

A coaching team that is united behind its leader and whose members work closely together is guaranteed to win the support of the players for this type of coaching.

“Anyone who is seeking to achieve great things must first think of the small details.”

Paul Valéry

Figure 6: The technical staff



4. Coaching young players: the dual role of coach and educator

The difference between the top-level coach and the coach/educator

• *The top-level coach*

- Has the primary task of shaping and preparing the first team for competition.
- Has to achieve results.
- Trains top-level players.
- Works as part of a team (coaching team) with assistants and other staff.
- Mostly works together with the whole team at a training session.
- Handles in particular everything that is related to tactical and psychological matters.
- Works in stressful situations and in a demanding environment, and often for a relatively short period.

His key functions

- Responsibility for coaching
- Organisation, planning, scheduling and assessment
- Training and coaching of the team
- Relations with the media, players' agents, sponsors, supporters ...
- Scouting/recruitment with specific staff
- Other duties, depending on the club

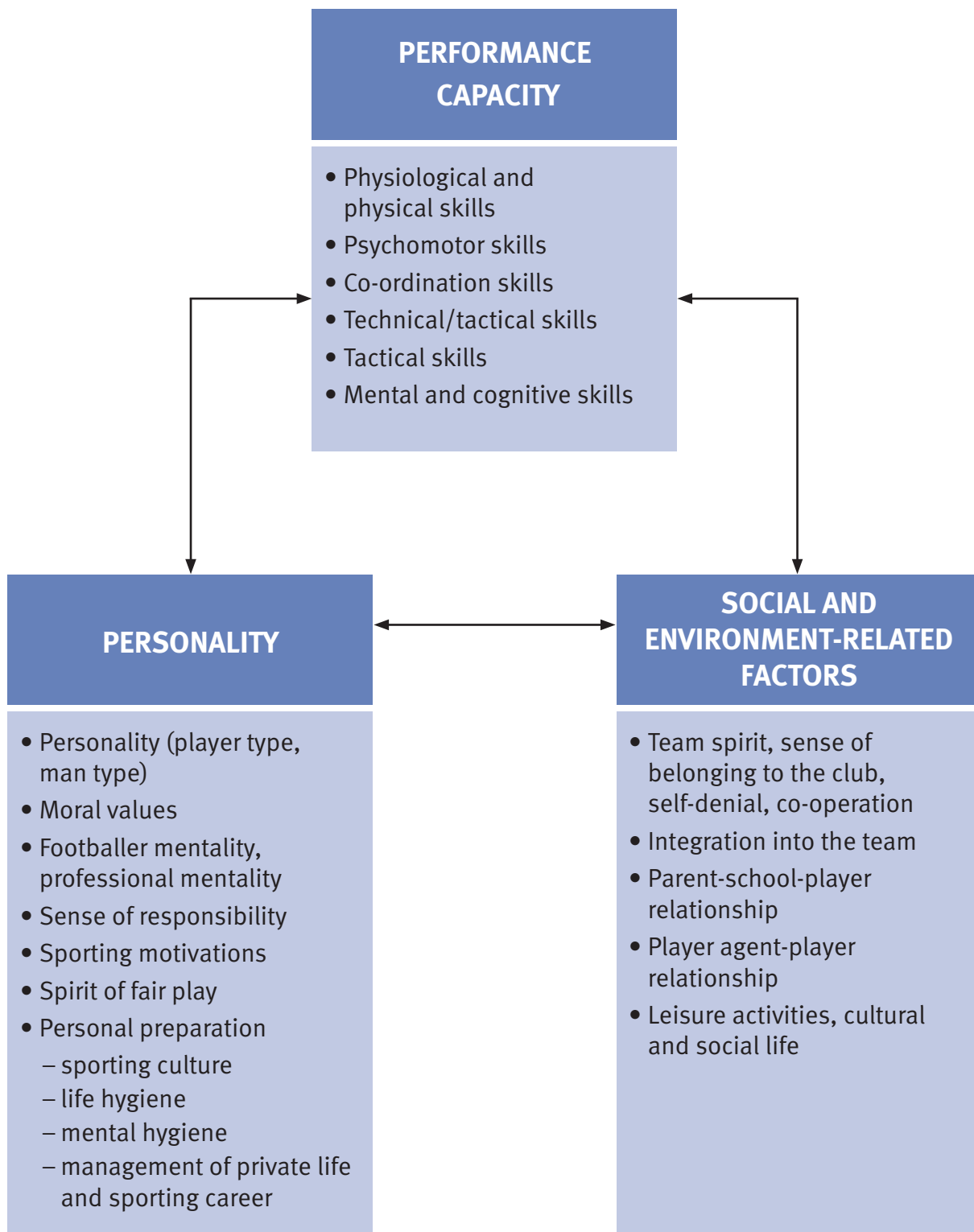
• *The coach/educator*

- Has the key task of shaping and developing young players according to their development level. Helps young players to mould themselves as players and as men.
- Uses competition as a means of shaping and developing players. Although he aims to achieve results, this is not done at all costs. Victory does bring great satisfaction, but his real triumph is achieved when his young players are integrated into the first team and play at international level.
- Often works alone or with just one or two colleagues.
- Trains the whole team in collective sessions, but concentrates the bulk of his work on individual training and in small groups.
- Handles all areas of training (technical, technical/tactical, physical, and mental) and dealings with the players' families, schools and even their private lives.
- Has to face responsibilities and demands in his work that are almost as great as those of a top-level coach.
- Works together with youngsters who have a family life, their schooling or possibly even a professional career away from their football activity.
- The coach/educator is a demanding and positive figure, who has to be willing to listen to the young players in his charge in his role as a support, guide, mentor, and even father figure.

His key functions

- Responsibility for coaching young footballers
- Organisation, planning, scheduling and assessment (in the medium and long term)
- Individual training and team coaching
- Relations with the technical direction and head coach of the club
- Relations with schools, parents and players' agents
- Communication with the players (keeping himself informed about them, listening to them, understanding them and advising them).

Figure 7: Areas of development for the young footballer



The role of the coach/educator

The function of training and instructing for a coach/educator is not that different from the same function for a top-level coach – less than one might imagine, in fact. What we can say, however, is that the role of a youth coach requires considerable mobility of action and great availability.

Although his principal function is to prepare young footballers to become the professional footballers of the future, he must not place too much emphasis on the competitive aspect to the detriment of training and developing the players' performance-related skills. The player-coach relationship must be at the core of the activity of the coach/educator, thereby ensuring that he can assume his role as the mentor or even father figure that youngsters are often looking for at this formative age. They need reference points and affective security; they need to be understood and appreciated; they need to be encouraged and stimulated to excel themselves. The coach/educator cannot even begin to educate unless he himself possesses human qualities that are recognised and accepted by the youngsters.

The coach/educator must maintain a relationship of confidentiality and trust with the player's family and school environment; without such a relationship, nothing worthwhile can be achieved. It is axiomatic to state that good coaching skills are essential to train and supervise youngsters and especially to help their personalities blossom to the full. This notwithstanding, the coach/educator will spend the bulk of his time on the pitch.

The art of the dedicated, dynamic and proficient coach consists in being able to select training targets that are suited to the players, to plan worthwhile learning activities, to run their games and drills with passion, to encourage the players to correct their mistakes by themselves, to praise their success, as well as being able to promote creativity and discovery by giving precise explanations and demonstrations.

• *How do young players view the coach/educator?*

An exemplary educator is one who supports, guides and advises:

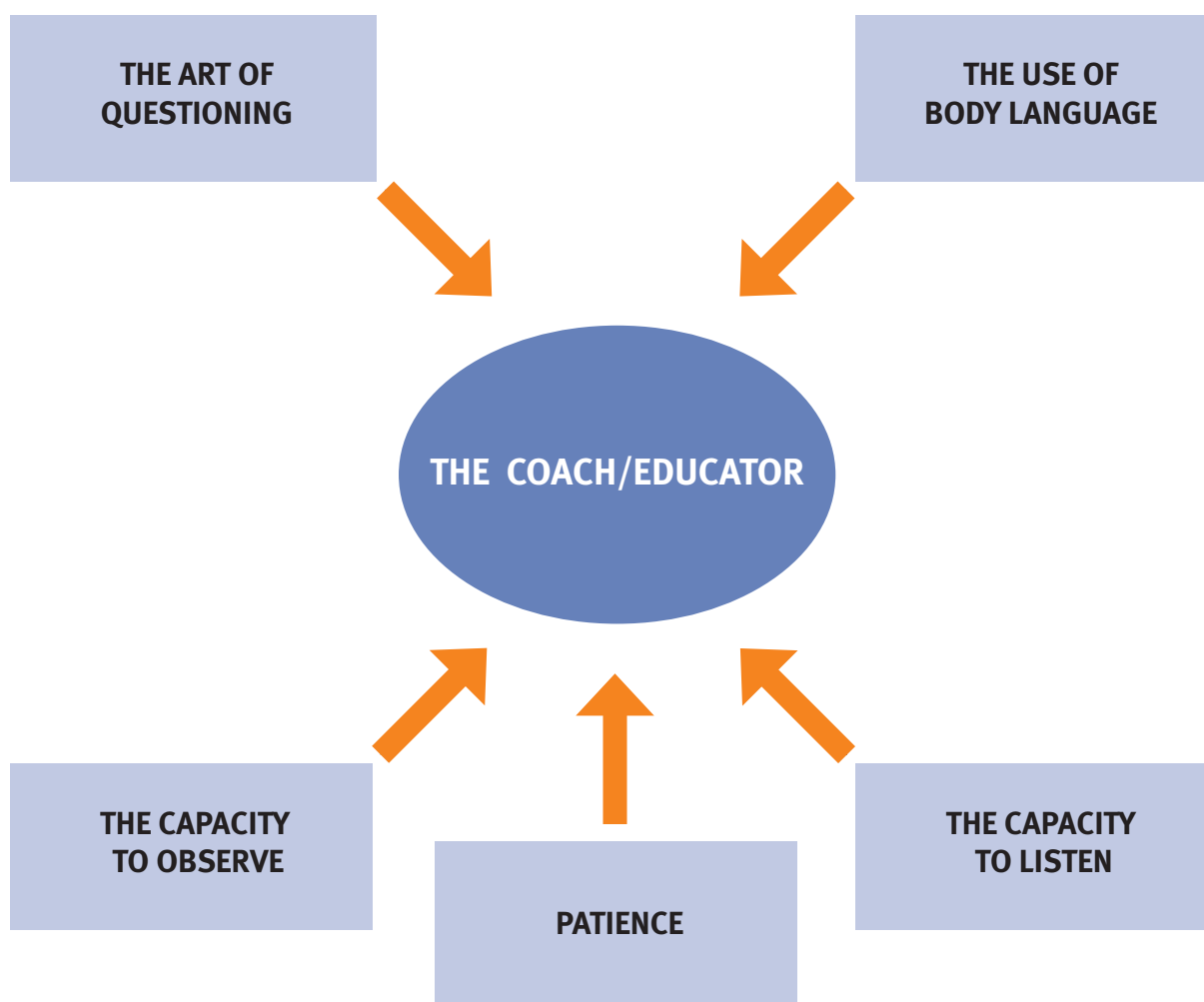
- he is fair and loyal and is able to demonstrate that he has a sympathetic attitude;
- he knows how to listen, and he understands youngsters;
- he encourages, he motivates, and he knows how to get the best out of people;
- he addresses every player and the team with the necessary authority.

• *What to aim for in the relationship between the coach/educator and young players undergoing training and development*

(according to José Pekerman, ex-technical director and coach of Argentina's youth teams that won three World Youth Championships under him)

- Never lose sight of the fact that these promising youth players have still not completed their personal and emotional development; they are not adults.
- Help them to develop and refine their technical skills and their tactical awareness.
- Be able to imagine yourself in their shoes so that you can understand their problems and their emotions; be able as well to make them feel better about themselves.
- Contribute to their development without any prejudices.
- Make them aware of their responsibilities.
- To achieve all of this, coaches clearly need to have pedagogical skills.

Figure 8: The key skills required by the coach/educator



The ten commandments of the coach/educator

1. Enjoy working with youngsters.
2. Get to know his players well.
3. Act as a reference point for them.
4. Be demanding and tolerant.
5. Be willing to listen to them.
6. Encourage real communication with all the players.
7. Show them that you are “in league” with them.
8. Ensure that they have some free space for themselves.
9. Give them confidence and reassure them.
10. Consider them as equal partners

What he must avoid doing

1. Shouting constantly or being too aggressive.
2. Wanting to train his players or getting them to play as if they were adults.
3. Forgetting the prime motivation of youngsters, namely just playing.
4. Forgetting the technical rudiments of the game.
5. Setting targets for them that are not suited to their age.
6. Conducting training sessions that are mere routine.
7. Staying too long on the same drill.
8. Giving presentations and explanations that are too long and interrupting training sessions too frequently.
9. Criticising a player in front of the rest of the group.
10. Accepting a deterioration in standards in the players’ learning or footballing environment.

“When working with youngsters, the bulk of the coach’s attention should be focused not so much on their technique, but on the spirit in which they play the game, on how their game evolves, the maturity of their game, their competitive spirit, and the pleasure they get from playing.”

Rinus Michels, former coach of the Dutch national team