
Do co-oriented dyads predict athletes' perceptions of competence at the beginning and at the end of a sports season?

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Résumé

Introduction

For more than twenty years, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (CAR) as conceptualized in the 3+1Cs model (Jowett, 2007) has been considered as a key-element in athlete development. For instance, literature revealed that athletes' perceptions of closeness (e.g., mutual emotional support), commitment (e.g., co-construction of goals), and complementarity (e.g., cooperation) are positively associated with their perceived competence (Jackson et al., 2010). However, the association with co-orientation (i.e., the degree of concordance between both coaches' and athletes' perceptions of their CAR) has received limited attention in the literature. In addition, most studies have focused on only some aspects of co-orientation and have relied on cross-sectional designs, which do not allow for the examination of changes over time. The present study aims to expend the current knowledge on this topic by exploring the associations between actual similarities (i.e., concordance between coaches' and athletes' direct perceptions of the CAR quality), athletes' assumed similarities (i.e., concordance between and athletes' direct and meta-perceptions of the CAR quality), and athletes' empathic understanding (i.e., concordance between coaches' direct and athletes' meta-perceptions of the CAR quality) with athletes' perceived competence over the course of a sport season.

Method

One hundred and fifty-two French handball players (76 males, 50%) with an average age of 15.09 (SD = 0.87) involved in intensive training centers participated to this study with their coaches (N = 9, Mage = 34.39, SD = 5.62, all men). The quality of the CAR perceived by both coaches and athletes at the beginning and the end of the sport season was measured using the French version of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (Roux & Trouilloud, 2025). In addition, athletes' perceived competence (Trouilloud & Amiel, 2011) was also measured at both time points. Response surface analyses were conducted to explore the associations between the different dimensions of co-orientation and athletes' perceived competence, and to examine whether these associations changed over time.

Results

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For all dimensions of co-orientation, the response surface analyses revealed that at the beginning and the end of the season, athletes' perceived competence is higher when athletes' and coaches' perceptions of the CAR quality match at high levels ($p < .001$). In addition, for empathic understanding, athletes report higher perceived competence when coaches' direct perceptions of the CAR are lower than athletes' meta-perceptions ($p < .001$) at both time points. However, at the end of the season, the response surface analyses for assumed similarities suggested that athletes' perceived competence is higher when athletes' direct and meta-perceptions match at more extreme levels than at midrange levels ($p < .001$).

Discussion

Overall, the results support theoretical principles of co-orientation dimension of the 3+1Cs model (Jowett, 2007) indicating that athletes' perceived competence is higher when coaches and athletes share a highly positive view of their relationship. However, results also suggest that the associations between co-orientation and athletes' perceived competence is likely to change over time. More precisely, athletes' perceived competence appears to be less negatively affected by low-level concordance as the season progresses.

Conclusion

By exploring the co-orientation through response surface analysis, this study offers new insights into the understanding of the CAR. Futures studies are encouraged to further investigate this line of research by exploring the CAR quality through both coaches' and athletes' perspectives and examining how co-orientation contributes to athlete development over time.

References

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