

## **Developing intuitive thinking through priming and reflection: A pilot study**

**Tom Sibbald**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Background and Purpose**

It has been suggested that intuitive decision making is a major difference between the expert and less expert and that intuition is one of the 9 key skills which characterize experts (Schempp, 2010). How, then, can we help coaches to develop their intuitive thinking for coaching? One approach may be the use of priming. Priming allows the coach to prepare observation markers (pattern recognition) and to consider some of the outcomes of a task which may occur (response selection). It prepares the mind to filter the available information and search for matches (associative thinking). All of which are cognitive process that intuition relies heavily on. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to pilot the use of priming – a conscious, cognitive, rational thinking task - to help coaches develop their intuitive thinking skills.

#### **What was done?**

Participants: The target coaches for the study were candidates for the Level 2 assessment. The development period from Level 1 to Level 2 Coach was chosen for three reasons:

- the environment is more open and changes more frequently
- the group have a bigger range of skills, so are harder to predict
- technical understanding has increased so coaches can choose from different options

Level 2 Coaches who can respond in these three areas tend to do very well, whilst those who cannot manage these quick responses struggle with their Level 2 assessment.

Process: A test was developed to assess the effect of priming on coaching (i.e., how well could coaches identify key performance markers in performers). Priming and reflection tools were also developed to assist and focus coaches' planning, delivery, and post-session reflection. These were tested with a group of six Level 2 candidates and two Level 2 trainers.

#### **Key findings**

When priming was used to help observation, it enabled coaches to be more effective at seeing key performance markers and responding in real time.

Three out of the six coaches loved the priming and reflection tools and thought they made a significant difference to their coaching. Two coaches used the tools but were non-committal about the impact. One coach felt the tools did not help.

Through observation of the coaches, it was noted that the coaches began to notice key markers and respond earlier. The evidence is that the current priming tool can help a Level 2 trainee coach, but some aspects may be too advanced.

**Points of interest for coaches:**

For a coach to be intuitive, they would need to know what was important to look for, be in a place where they could see at the right time and know what response was appropriate. Conscious preparation (priming) increases the ability to detect relevant patterns and to choose and implement appropriate responses from a store of past experiences. This study focused on priming and reflection tools to assist coaches' conscious preparation. There are a number of other tools which help strengthen intuitive thinking such as storytelling and imagery.

**Conclusion**

The developed tools appear to show some promise with regards to assisting Level 2 trainee coaches to enhance their coaching. Further development is recommended to improve and test the effectiveness of the priming and reflection tools. However, if the results are positive, coach education could easily incorporate priming into its programme.

If you would like further information on the research or to receive a copy of the full project please contact Tom on: [canoecoaching@btinternet.com](mailto:canoecoaching@btinternet.com)