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## ORIGINAL

### A CASE STUDY ON THE TRANSMISSION OF A TASK CLIMATE IN SPORT

### UN ESTUDIO DE CASOS SOBRE LA TRANSMISIÓN DE UN CLIMA TAREA EN EL DEPORTE

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#### ABSTRACT

The motivational climate conveyed by a coach can exert a, important influence on the attitude of athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). Along these lines, training programmes for coaches should facilitate the necessary strategies to improve the transmission of climate during their workouts. The main objective was to analyse the Training Programme for Coaches (TPC) (Conde, Almagro, Sáenz-López, Domínguez, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010), on the motivational climate conveyed by a basketball coach and his perception of the players' motivation. The design was a case study of a basketball coach. We used an interview and diary for data collection. The programme allowed the coach to acquire skills for the transmission of a mastery climate. Along these lines, an improvement in the transmission of task climate is needed to improve athletes' motivation and adherence to sport.

**KEY WORDS:** motivation, training programme, basketball coaches

## RESUMEN

El clima motivacional transmitido por el entrenador puede influir de manera determinante en la actitud de los deportistas (Smith, Smoll, y Cumming, 2007). Así, los programas de formación deben facilitar a los entrenadores las estrategias necesarias que permitan mejorar la transmisión de clima-tarea durante sus entrenamientos. El objetivo fundamental del estudio fue evaluar cualitativamente la puesta en práctica del *Programa Indagativo de Formación para Entrenadores* (PIFE) (Conde, Almagro, Sáenz-López, Domínguez, y Moreno-Murcia, 2010), sobre el clima motivacional transmitido por un entrenador de baloncesto, así como su percepción sobre la motivación de los jugadores. El diseño fue un estudio de casos. Se utilizó la entrevista y el diario para la recogida de datos. El programa PIFE ha conseguido que el entrenador adquiera los conocimientos para la transmisión de un clima tarea. En este sentido, una mejora de la transmisión de clima tarea es necesaria para mejorar la motivación de los deportistas y la adherencia a la práctica deportiva.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** motivación, Programa de formación, entrenadores de baloncesto

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a key period when deciding to drop out or continue practicing a physical activity or sport (Boiché & Sarrazin, 2009; García Calvo, Cervelló, Jiménez, Iglesias, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). Therefore, to foster the commitment toward physical activity and sport, it is important to assess the variables that are most influential. Thus, various studies have focused on analysing the athletes' most important and influential figures at this stage; those which they should act on are what is referred to as the "athletic triangle" made up of the athletes, the family, and the coach (Cruz, 1997; Sousa, Cruz, Torregrosa, Vilches, & Viladrich, 2006). In fact, the effect of the coach on the motivation of his or her players is widely demonstrated (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007; Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Zomermaand, 2010).

From this perspective, sport training and competition become two very appropriate contexts for producing positive effects and an enjoyable experience. To achieve this, it should not be forgotten that the coach plays a key role in the motivation of the athletes (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008; Almagro, Sáenz-López, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007), and becomes a reference model for the young athletes (Smoll & Smith, 2006; Balaguer, Castillo, & Duda, 2008). Along these lines, training and competition create many interactions between the coach and the athlete, which can be taken advantage of to transmit a specific motivational climate (Conde, Almagro, Sáenz-López,

Domínguez, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010; Conde, Almagro, Sáenz-López, & Castillo, 2009).

The motivational climate transmitted by the coach may strongly influence the attitude of the athletes. Ames (1992) defines it as a collection of signals that are perceived in the environment. In our case, they are all the pieces of information (conscious and unconscious) that the coach transmits to his or her players, from which the keys to success and failure take shape. There are two types of climate: task, in which learning and personal effort are fostered, and ego, in which comparison and surpassing others is fostered. Various studies (Le Bars, Gernigon, & Ninot, 2009; Torregrosa, Sousa, Viladrich, Villamarín, & Cruz, 2008; Torregrosa, Viladich, Ramis, Azócar, Latinjak, & Cruz, 2011) demonstrate that a motivational climate that is oriented toward task can have positive consequences on the motivation of the athletes, such as having fun during practice. Along these lines, Ames (1992) developed a set of motivational strategies that allowed the coach to emphasise the players' goal structures. He compiled six dimensions on which the coach should act to create a task climate. He used the acronym TARGET, which stands for *Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time*.

Along these lines, training programmes can facilitate the necessary strategies for improving the transmission of a task climate in practices to coaches. There are various training programmes that analyse the behaviour and interactions of the coaches to promote a task motivational climate. The most prominent is *Coach Effectiveness Training (CET)*, by Smith, Smoll, and Curtis (1979), with the objective of measuring and promoting positive behavioural changes, making coaches conscious of their behaviours when they interact with their athletes and the possible consequences of these behaviours on the athletes. The studies that have applied this training programme (CET) (Smith, Smoll, & Barnett 1995; Smoll & Smith, 2006; Sousa, Smith, & Cruz, 2008) obtained results that demonstrated improved conduct and interactions by those coaches that took part in the programme. Later, some modifications to the CET programme were done, resulting in the *Mastery Approach to Coaching (MAC)*, which is focused on the climate that a coach may generate, basically on the positive consequences of the transmission of a task motivational climate. Along these lines, Smith et al. (2007) demonstrated that the coaches that participated in this programme increased the task orientation in their athletes. Another programme is the *Personalised Assessment Programme for Coaches (PAPC)*, which follows the guidelines of the two previous programmes and was conceived by Sousa et al. (2006). In contrast with the other programmes, it is personalised, based on the specific necessities of each coach. Various studies that have used the PAPC have obtained positive results for the coaches that have participated in the programme, in addition to obtaining positive results regarding the athletic commitment of their players (Cruz, Torregrosa, Sousa, Mora & Viladrich, 2010; Mora, Cruz & Torregrosa, 2009; Sousa, Cruz, Viladrich, & Torregrosa, 2007). Another intervention programme (Conde, Almagro, Sáenz-López, Domínguez, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010), in agreement not only with the need for a coach's individual learning but also with the individual learning process, is the *Training*

*Programme for Coaches* (TPC), in which coaches are facilitated motivational strategies to create a task climate during their training sessions. This training process, in contrast with the others, is carried out with a personalised methodology, based on provoking the coach to question, strengthening his self-reflexion, and seeking his own solutions under the supervision of an expert. This type of programme, based on inquiry and reflection, is based on the studies carried out in the area of teacher training, where authors such as Schön (1992) conclude that only when a teacher carries out reflexion can he or she become an expert.

In spite of this, currently, there are not many studies (Cruz et al., 2010; Cumming, Smith, Smoll, Standage, & Grossbard, 2008; Smith et al., 2007) that have measured the effects of an intervention on a coach's training to help him to create a task motivational climate during sports practice. Therefore, we have not found many qualitative studies that assess motivation and the transmission of climates in the sports context (Clifford & Hanrahan, 2004; Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005), and none were carried out in Spain. Recently, in a qualitative study, Keegan, Harwood, Spray, and Lavalley (2009) provided a vision of the motivational climate experienced by young athletes that demonstrates coherence with existing motivational theories. Therefore, we believe that qualitative methodology can help to look deeper and understand how to improve the effect of certain social factors on the motivation of young athletes, in addition to allowing us to carry out an assessment of the TPC programme. Along these lines, we agree with Castejón (2007) for whom the assessment of programmes, although possibly a slower process, should be carried out through self-assessment, collaborative evaluation, or case studies, since they allow one to look deeper at important aspects than with other standardised instruments.

## **OBJECTIVES**

With a focus on the coach's perception, the main objective of the present study was to qualitatively evaluate how the *Training Programme for Coaches* (TPC) affected the motivational climate transmitted by a basketball coach. More specifically, the following objectives were sought:

- To describe the practical application of strategies for the transmission of a task climate
- To assess the coach's perception of his players' motivation
- To evaluate the evolution of the motivational climate during the application of a training programme

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Participants**

The coach who was studied was 31 years of age, had completed secondary education, and had national basketball coaching certification. He had more than 9 years of coaching experience, and he had coached for 4 years in upper age

divisions and regional selective teams. During the study, he was coaching two teams in the U16 division, one boys' team and one girls' team.

## **Instruments**

*Interview.* The interview was semi-structured to allow the interviewer to look more in-depth at certain topics according to the progression of the interview. For its design, the following recommendations (Flick, 2007; Patton, 1983; Roulston, 2006) were followed: yes/no questions were avoided, the question was repeated if the interviewee did not answer, each question was introduced to give him time to think, and the interview was audio recorded. The outline went through several stages: initial study (other interviews from similar studies were analysed), first version was written, expert review for content analysis, pilot interview for interviewer training, and definitive writing of the interview outline. The interviews were grouped into cycles of supervision, which consisted of two interviews, one about the programming of practice sessions where various questions were asked (e.g. "What type of training tasks have you programmed to carry out during practice?"). The second interview was to encourage remembering, in which questions about how practice sessions were carried out, and what aspects he would try to improve in the following practice sessions were asked (e.g. "How have you assessed your players?").

*Diary.* For the use of this instrument, some recommendations (Zabalza, 1991) were taken into account: completing it the same day as the training session to foster remembering details, selecting content to work on, and progressing from describing details to reflecting on them. The content that was selected covers each of the TARGET premises (Ames, 1992), which were assigned to the coach one-by-one throughout the intervention programme. In this way, the coach reflected on how he was carrying out each of these premises.

## **Design and procedure**

The present study is within the interpretative paradigm (Colás & Buendía, 1998) and utilises a qualitative methodology, since it is necessary to look closely at the behaviours that could be overlooked with other more standardised methods. This methodology has its origins in ethnography and in phenomenology, and it has been utilised for decades in sociology and education. However, as Thomas and Nelson (2007) affirm, it is relatively new in the area of physical activity and especially in sport. Along these lines, the qualitative technique of studying single cases was used, resulting in a single sample unit (Montero & León, 2002).

We contacted the club that the coach worked for to ask permission and to ask for the coach's collaboration, and we explained the objective of the study. Twelve interviews were carried out throughout the training programme, coinciding with the TPC supervision cycles. Each cycle included a programming interview, training sessions, and an interview to stimulate the coach's memory with the objective to plan improvements.

The TPC programme was carried out during the three months that the intervention lasted. The content of the programme included the TARGET premises (Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time), which were also the codes that were utilised (Table 1). This was carried out through a methodology using inquiry, in which the supervisor oriented the interviewee and sought reflexion as well as maximal involvement by the interviewee. Six cycles of supervision were utilised, each one lasting 15 days and having the same outline (Sáenz-López, 2001): previous interview (planning), viewing the session, interview to stimulate memory and viewing the recording of the session, and finally, reflection on the observation and proposed changes. Further, other training strategies, such as reading and discussing specific bibliography, coaches' diaries, reflections on the observer's notes, and two training seminars with specialists in the material were also carried out. Following Giménez, Rodríguez, and Castillo (2002), the starting point was the coach's needs, which were the training sessions with the experts, and they were based primarily on the area of pedagogy. This content was negotiated with the coach, according to his interests and needs.

Table 1. *Dimensions and codes*

Dimensions	Codes	Description
Task Climate	Task	Designing activities based on variety, personal challenge, and active involvement.
	Authority	Involving participants in decisions and in leadership roles. Helping athletes develop techniques of self-control and self-direction.
	Recognition	Recognising individual progress and improvement. Assuring the same opportunities for obtaining rewards. Positive reinforcement, encouragement.
	Grouping	Grouping the athletes flexibly and heterogeneously and making multiple ways of grouping possible.
	Evaluation	Utilising criteria related to personal progress and task mastery. Involving the athletes in self-assessment, internal feedback of the player
	Time	Making opportunities possible as well as time for progress for the benefit of the task
Ego Climate	Task	Monotonous, repetitive, boring, analytical tasks
	Authority	Excluding the players from decision making, not giving them responsibility, not giving them autonomy, etc.
	Recognition	Unequal recognition, punishment
	Grouping	Grouping by level, pre-established by the coach
	Evaluation	Evaluating according to performance instead of personal progress, comparing with teammates, fostering rivalry between teammates
Motivation	Time	Time in detriment of task and learning
	Extrinsic	Motivation of players by external causes
	Intrinsic	Motivation of players by internal causes

After the literal transcription of the interviews and defining and describing the codes, the first step of the qualitative analysis was to assign codes to the transcribed text. Authors such as Moreno et al. (2002) and Flick (2007) recommend that this process be carried out by various coders, to reach an agreement that guarantees reliability. In our case, the coding was carried out by four coders as well as the principal investigator, all of whom attended all the meetings in which the training sessions for the coders were carried out.

The first meeting was to familiarise the coders with the dimensions and categories, where the codes were clarified and some changes were made. Once these were clearly defined, at the second meeting, coding was done in group, resolving problems and doubts that would arise in order to arrive at a consensus. After the second meeting, the participants were very familiar with the codes, and they individually coded and compared the results. At the end of each meeting, the degree of reliability was calculated and when it surpassed 80%, it was considered that each member could code on their own (Goetz & LeCompte, 1988). Inter-coder reliability of 90% was obtained. This occurred in the fifth training session.

### **Analysis of the data**

The data were coded with the MXQDA 2010 computer programme, which allowed us to carry out the following functions: determine the frequency of the codes that served to support the interpretations, recover the text by code, and compare the results from one interview to another.

## **RESULTS**

### **Analysis of the dimensions according to the cycles of supervision and the coach's diary**

As Maxwell (2010) indicates, the use of frequency analysis can provide guidance regarding the importance of the dimensions and codes. For this reason, the analysis of the results is structured into three dimensions: task climate, ego climate, and motivation.

*Task climate dimension.* This dimension was the most frequent, increasing progressively throughout the training programme (Figure 1). Within this dimension, the codes that appeared most frequently were: task, time, and evaluation (Table 2). The coach commented on the importance of carrying out activities with opposition, creating game-like situations: "I don't like to do it without opposition, so that they are the ones that decide, because without opposition, it's not real". Further, it fosters the self-evaluation and reflection of the players, giving them the necessary time to assimilate what they've learned: "guided discovery, probing feedback so they make their own decisions". The codes that had the highest progression during the training programme were recognition and authority. The coach believed that it was necessary to foster decision making and reinforce players when they made their own decisions, regardless of the result: "positively

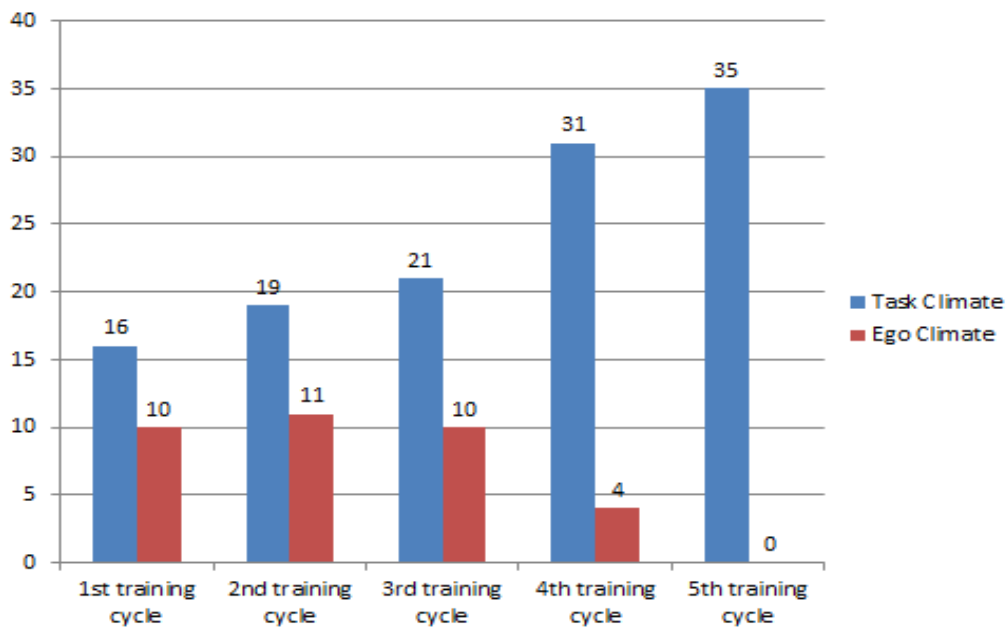
reinforce everything that they do...and the same players should make decisions so that they know how to resolve [them]".

According to the coach's diary, within the task climate dimension, the codes that appeared with the highest frequency were task, authority, and evaluation. The coach commented on the importance of using tasks with opposition where they had freedom to decide. Further, he highlighted the importance of using probing feedback: "I am trying to orient the activities toward decision making for the players so that they can be familiar with the results first hand and whether we achieve what we intend to or not...although I try to give them clues and I make the objective clear". The codes time and recognition have a similar frequency. For recognition, the coach reflected on the need to evaluate the individual progress of his players and of the job they do: "the players keep working well and working hard, and they are demonstrating that they are capable of making good decisions. It is a pleasure to work with them". Along these lines, the coach affirms that in order to progress, you must give players time to assimilate and reinforce what they have learned, adapt ourselves to the players' level, and modify the programming when necessary: "we have to adapt ourselves to the players' rhythm of learning".

*Ego climate dimension.* There was a regression throughout the training programme (Figure 1). Within this dimension, the codes of recognition, task, and evaluation appeared with one of the highest frequencies at the beginning of the programme, while they disappeared in the last few cycles of supervision (Table 2). Along these lines, at the beginning of the TPC programme, the coach believed that for his players to perform well and put forth a strong effort, and even to motivate them, he had to punish them. Thus, he used analytical tasks and conditioning exercises: "I am using punishment, not for any other reason than to have them involved and motivated...". Regarding the code of evaluation, although there was not a very high frequency, it also diminished. The coach would sometimes evaluate according to the result: "we are having some really low percentages and...there are a lot of games in which the shots are the deciding factor".

According to the coach's diary, within the ego climate dimension, the code that appears most often is that of evaluation. Along these lines, the coach reflected on the knowledge of results that he would give to the players and how they responded to probing feedback. The coach believed that the players did not stop to think about what the best solution was: "they pay little attention to reflecting on what is the best solution...that is why on some occasions I have to tell them how to act". Following evaluation, and appearing very infrequently, is the code recognition, on which the coach reflected regarding the type of reinforcements that he gave as well as those he thought that he should give: "maybe my work should be more focused on positive reinforcement and not on negative [reinforcement]".

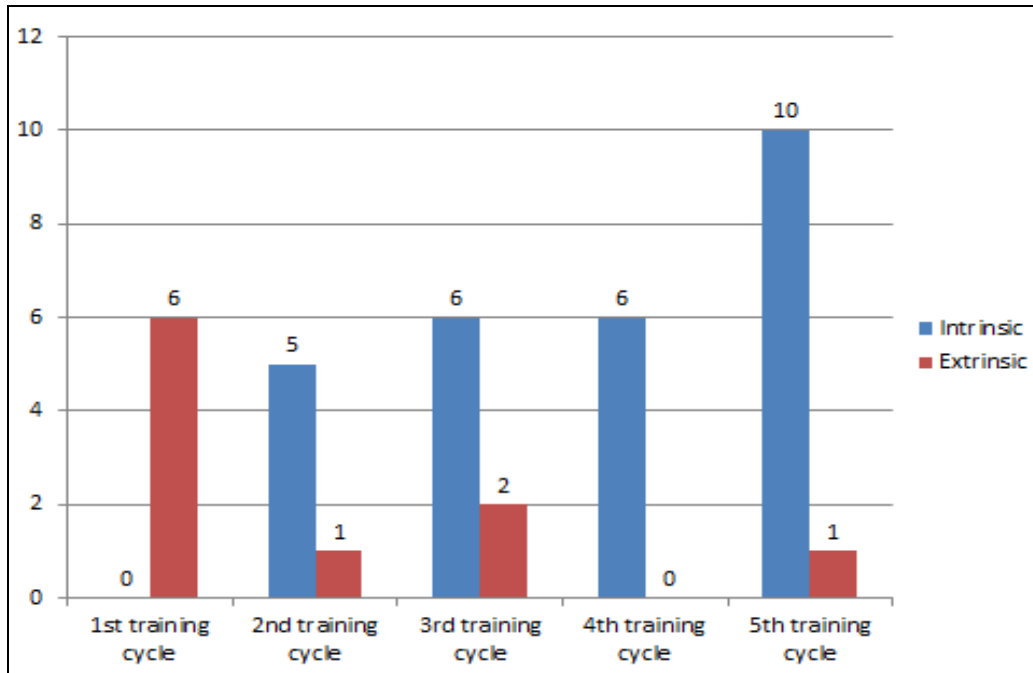




**Figure 1.** Evolution of the frequency of the task climate and ego climate dimensions throughout the training cycles

*Motivation dimension.* Within this dimension, a progression of the frequency of the codes throughout the TPC was found; specifically, there was an increase in intrinsic motivation and a decrease in extrinsic motivation (Figure 2). The code intrinsic motivation obtained a higher frequency (Table 2). The coach commented, particularly in the last few cycles of training, on the positive attitude of his players in practices and in games, in relation to their desire to practice, to the fun being had, to the good relationships between the players: "the girls come to run, to fight for the ball, to applaud, to yell,...in games, they are working hard and working well, and it is contagious". While there was an increase in intrinsic motivation, there was a progressive decrease in extrinsic motivation. In fact, the coach believed in the first two training cycles that his players were not committed to training and that this was strengthened by a lack of games and good opponents: "there is still a lack of concentration...the players come to practices a lot of times just to come...maybe it is because of the competition or the lack of competition".

According to the coach's diary, the code that emerges as the strongest within this dimension is intrinsic motivation. The coach reflected on the good work done by his players and on the importance of having fun during games and practices: "the group of girls is on a good path, improving, they are more responsible, and you can tell that many of them are having fun, especially since I'm using more ludic activities". After this, extrinsic motivation appears, and the coach commented on the lack of commitment that his players had regarding attending practices: "low attendance by the boys". The coach believed that this could be caused by the lack of opponent skill level: "the group is working at a slow rhythm, in part due to ... that we find that we play against opponents that we can easily beat".



**Figure 2.** Evolution of the frequency of the codes for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation throughout the training cycles

**Table 2.** Frequency of the interview's codes and dimensions regarding the training cycles of the TPC

Dimensions	Codes	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	Total
Task Climate		16	19	21	31	35	122
	Task	5	8	11	10	5	39
	Authority	1	0	2	4	9	16
	Recognition	0	1	2	4	5	12
	Grouping	0	1	0	1	1	3
	Evaluation	4	7	4	5	6	26
	Time	6	2	2	7	9	26
Ego Climate		10	11	10	4	0	35
	Task	5	2	2	1	0	10
	Authority	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Recognition	2	5	7	0	0	14
	Grouping	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Evaluation	2	3	1	0	0	6
	Time	1	1	0	3	0	5
Motivation		6	6	8	6	11	37
	Intrinsic	0	5	6	6	10	27
	Extrinsic	6	1	2	0	1	10

Note: CS = Cycle of supervision

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to qualitatively evaluate the effect of the *Training Programme for Coaches* (TPC) on the motivational climate transmitted by a basketball coach, as well as to assess this coach's perception of this on the players' motivation. Regarding the evaluation of the programme, the coach believed that it had benefited him, in the development of the training sessions. He further believed that it benefited the players, with the effect that it had on the players' motivation: "I believe that the result of all this sacrifice (due to my lack of time) is coming into effect and we are seeing its fruits". We concur with Castejón (2007) in that the qualitative methodology allowed us to look closely at the evaluation of the training programme (TPC); thus, we are able to confirm that we have achieved the desired objective.

Regarding the objective of assessing the progress of the motivational climate throughout the TPC programme, it can be confirmed that this was possible, since there was an increase in the task climate dimension and a decrease in the ego climate throughout the programme, coinciding with the results obtained from the coach's diary. Further, the task climate was the dimension that appeared the strongest, although this seems logical since the transmission of the task climate was the principal objective of the TPC. Coinciding with some of the TARGET premises proposed by Ames (1992), the coach believed that both the design of the tasks as well as adequate assessment were important. Both had to be focused on ceding autonomy. Along these lines, the tasks had to be designed to strengthen decision making, through games with opposition and with various levels of achievement. The assessments should be carried out in an interrogative way in order to foster reflection and autonomous learning: "when something needs to be corrected, [you must] do it through questions, so that they can discover the answers on their own". Thus, the results are along the lines that Torregrosa et al. (2008) mentions in a study with football players where the players' perception of a task climate was positively related to the coach's behaviour regarding support.

A methodology involving supporting the player, the perception of task climate, and autonomy are positively related to intrinsic motivation both in the educational context (Mandigo, Holt, Anderson, & Sheppard, 2008; Ward, Wilkinson, Graser & Prusak, 2008), as well as in the athletic context (Almagro, Sáenz-López, & Moreno-Murcia, 2010; Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007). These relationships coincide with the results obtained in the present study based on the coach's perception, where the intrinsic motivation evolved positively throughout the training programme, while the extrinsic motivation evolved negatively. The coach perceived how his players experienced a more intrinsic motivation, related to fun and enjoyment during training sessions, as well as the results obtained in the coach's diary: "This is true; rather fun and competitive practices in order to free players from tension and relax so as to not tire out the players and to have them motivated and involved in the work". Therefore, regarding the final objective, which was to assess the coach's perception about players' motivation, we can say that the coach perceived that

the improvement in the transmission of a task climate positively influenced the intrinsic motivation of his basketball players.

Finally, the results that were obtained in the present study demonstrate consistency with the theories of motivation, achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000). Additionally, they are along the lines of the results obtained in various studies (Cruz et al, 2010; Morgan & Kingston, 2010; Torregrosa et al., 2011), for which we can say that intervention programmes oriented toward the promotion of a task climate can have positive effects on motivation, fun, and the commitment to sport practice. The present study provides new information regarding how a coach can intervene and how he or she can evolve in the transmission of a task climate. Along these lines, the improvement in this coach's transmission of a task climate and how this evolution throughout the training process came about is demonstrated step-by-step. However, it does have some limitations that should be kept in mind for future studies, such as the sample size, which given the fact that it was a case study, only takes into account the perception of one coach and, thus, we cannot generalise. Also, it would be interesting to carry out studies where the sample of coaches that takes part in the TPC programme is larger. In addition to carrying out interviews with the coach, it would also be beneficial to carry them out with the players in order to understand how they perceive the climate that is transmitted by the coach. Finally, we would like to highlight the importance of having the coaches know how to transmit a task climate. Therefore, it is necessary for there to be more training programmes that have as their primary objective the improvement of the task motivational climate.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

After the analysis of the TPC programme, we can conclude that the strategies applied by the coach foster the transmission of a task climate, which improved throughout the programme. Further, the coach perceived an increase in the players' intrinsic motivation.

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