

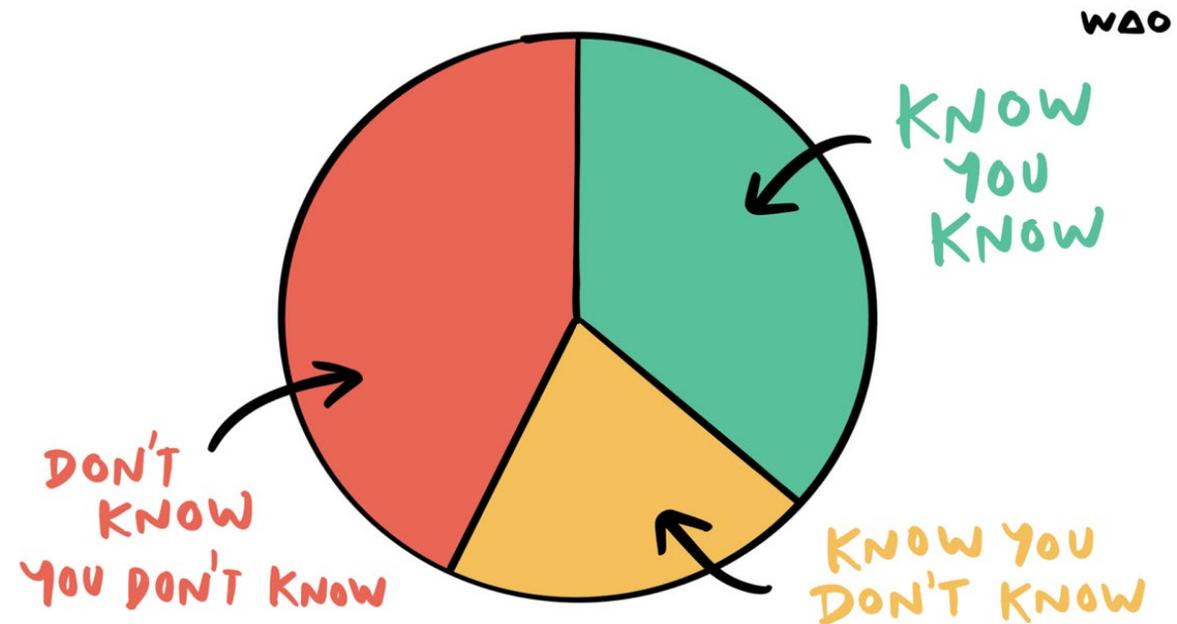
# The Practice and Role of Ignorance in Sport Coaching: Causes, Characteristics and Consequences

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# A brief reflection before we start...

- Please take a few moments to think about what you **don't** know about your sport or coaching...
- **Why** is it that you don't know this?



# Think about...

- The coach who has read about players potentially suffering from concussion, but who doesn't want to know more about the effects
- The coach who knows that there is bullying within the team, but who turns a blind eye
- The coach who won't read the latest academic research because *“they aren't in the real world”*

# Knowledge and Coaching

- Knowledge has been identified as being an intrinsic element of effective coaching (Nash & Collins, 2006; Quinaud, et al., 2020)
- Coaches to draw upon ‘multiple knowledges’ (Dempsey, et al, 2022), to support their athletes, whether about the sport itself, the athletes, or the underpinning science (Blumenstein, et al., 2012)
  - Coaching is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary
- Knowledge is “substantially used to organise and systematise coach education programmes and accreditation” (Quinaud, et al., 2020, p.303)
- Coach development frameworks focus overwhelmingly upon providing knowledge-related content (Smith, et al., 2022)

# Developing Coaching Knowledge

- Seen as an active process
- Emerging from
  - Formal sources such as professional training courses and coach education programmes
  - A range of other, informal means, such as social experiences and interactions with others, mentoring from other coaches, and learning communities
- Our understanding of coaching and knowledge is **extensive**

# Coaches and Lack of Knowledge

- We also understand what coaches don't know...such as
  - Nutrition (Botsis & Holden, 2015)
  - Injury prevention (De Ste Croix, et al., 2020)
  - The female triad (Brown, et al., 2014)
  - Concussion (Feiss, et al., 2020)
  - Athlete doping (Bredahl, 2011; Patterson & Backhouse, 2018)
  - Coach abuse (Kerr, et al., 2019)
  - Racism (Bradbury, 2021)
  - Misogyny and sexism (Barnes & Adams, 2020)

# But...

- These studies, however, take a specific view of such ignorance –
- Defining it as a **passive** lack of knowledge
- To date, no single study has explored ignorance in sport and sports coaching as an **active process** (including related areas such as sport psychology)

# What is Ignorance?

- As we have noted, it can be a passive lack of knowledge (after all, we cannot know everything)
- Especially in today's information rich society
- The dark matter of sports coaching.

# Our Conceptualisation

- We focus on an **alternative** form of ignorance
- Referred to variously as *deliberate*, *wilful* or *motivated* ignorance
  - Ignorance that is **actively** and **intentionally** used by an individual to avoid freely available and accessible information (Golman, et al., 2017; Williams, 2021)
  - That is **important** and **relevant** (Mudyń, 2023),
  - That we **should** know (Lynch, 2016)
- What you know you *don't* want to know about

# Micro and Macro Ignorance

- Such ignorance may be:
  - Micro – at an individual level
  - Macro - ‘the sedimentation of individual ignorance into rigid ideological positions or policy perspectives (McGoey (2020, p.200), leading to organisations demonstrating collective ignorance (Alvesson, et al. 2022; Engel & Hertwig, 2020; Jalonen, 2023)

# As yet...

- Not a single study of such ignorance within coaching related topics
- Only one study in the wider sport literature...(fan ignorance of the Saudi takeover of Newcastle United FC)
- Hence the need for an exploratory study

# Methodology

- An interpretivist qualitative methodology
- Interviews (so far n=18)
- Adopting a Maximum Variation Sample (based on level and experience)
- Interview guide open, but based upon Jalonen's (2003) framework of causes, characteristics and consequences

# Causes of Ignorance (1)

- An active choice – “I would rather not know”
- Perception of own abilities – for example, not understanding the mechanisms of concussion
- Or own identity – “this is the type of coach I am”/“I’m an old-fashioned type of coach”
- A need not to be overwhelmed
- A distrust of sources (including academia)

# Causes of Ignorance (2)

- A need to appear knowledgeable – leading to a focus upon what is already known
- A perception of the need to focus on less – especially within such a knowledge rich environment
- Organisational resistance (including “trickle down ignorance” impacting upon individual ignorance)

# Characteristics of Ignorance

- A “safety first” environment
- A focus in practice on what is known
- Organisational ignorance making unreasonable demands on coaches
- Lack of questioning, or being inquisitive
- Expertise as a “deepening rut”

# Consequences of Ignorance

- Potential stagnation – avoiding new ideas/“Sticking to old ideas”
- A lack of genuine understanding
- Understanding the need for a base knowledge – but not knowing what that base knowledge should be
- Not seeing the consequences until they are too late
- Coach “blindness”

# Discussion

- We have found ignorance to be evident across a range of coaches
- Some fully aware – others not so much (initially)
- There are a wide range of causes – both individual, social, organisational, and at a macro level
- These lead to consequences such as stagnation, undue focus on what is already known, and a potential lack of innovation

# Implications

- Although often not previously considered, coaches are able to both articulate and embody ignorance.
- Awareness of ignorance can and should be raised.
- Ignorance can be deliberate or unintentional.
- Ignorance is not necessarily negative.
- Ignorance may be necessary or appropriate in certain situations.
- Ignorance can be used as an active tool in positive constructive ways.
- There is a lot going on beneath the surface!

# Next Steps (in further addressing our own ignorance)

- A full thematic analysis of the data to identify all key themes
- The development of a framework of coaching ignorance
- To explore elements we have covered today in more depth, such as a focus on
  - Organisational ignorance
  - Outcomes/characteristics
- To develop recommendations for coach education/development

