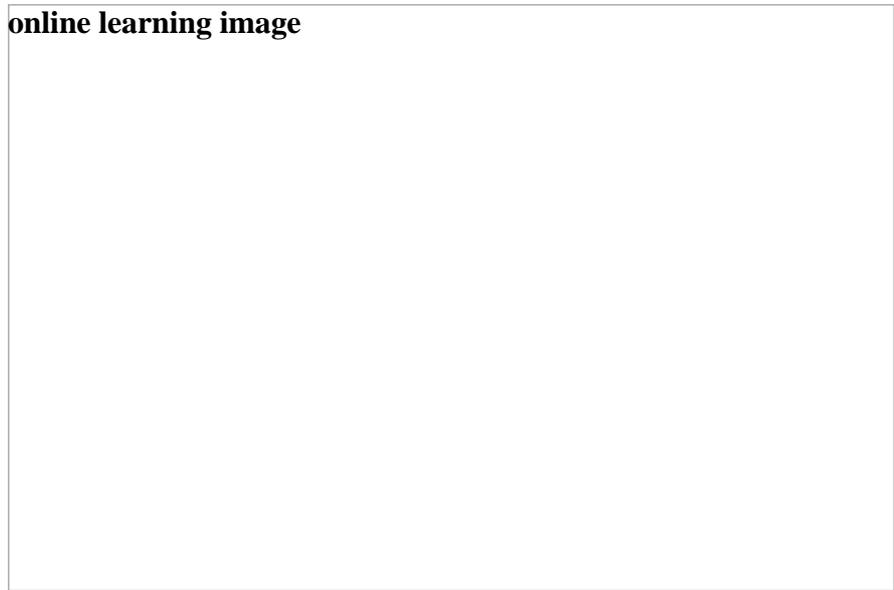# Coach Learning: Engaging coaches in online learning

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online learning image

This blog will explore what we know to date about coach learning and development and how we might use technology and online learning in order to deliver effective and meaningful learning experiences for coaches.

As this summer's sporting excitement begins to gather momentum, with Wimbledon, the Tour De France and the Women's Cricket World Cup, to name a few underway already, the multi-layered, hugely variable role of the coach in these big competitions becomes ever more relevant and increasingly intriguing. These high performing coaches display many effective skills and coaching qualities that underpin their success and just how coaches develop such skills and qualities has begun to emerge as a crucial area for exploration.

The question of how coaches learn to become good coaches has been receiving increased attention in recent decades, as sporting bodies, researchers and coach educators strive to find the best ways to develop their coaching workforce. Learning can be structured in various ways including *formal learning*, representing organised and structured learning that has set objectives and is always intentional (e.g. taking a coaching qualification); *non-formal learning*, which can be organised and have set objectives, but is more directed by the learner and can be a by-product of more formal activities (e.g. attending a local coaching group for discussion); and lastly *informal learning*, which is learning that lacks structure, has no set objectives, is rarely intentional and is often a result of experience (observing that a group of athletes don't respond well to your practice).

Despite most educational experiences for coaches are designed as more formal opportunities, research suggests that coaches perceive non-formal and informal learning to be integral to their development as coaches. Providing useful and relevant learning opportunities in this way has become a real directive for many coach educators.

The role of technology to serve this purpose has begun to be explored by a few governing bodies, with learning hubs, platforms and websites becoming increasingly visible (e.g. ConnectedCoaches!). The ability of technology to make learning materials easily accessible, allowing the coach to engage flexibly, and in their own time frame, seems intuitively appealing.

In their research in 2013, UK Coaching explored the appetite for online coach education finding that their respondents suggested they use online coach education materials and resources quite frequently, and are confident in doing so. They also found that the most useful resources for coaches seemed to be those that allowed them to network, share ideas and those that presented them with ideas for coaching, such as videos and You-Tube clips. These resources for learning however, are not without their challenges. Respondents suggested face to face contact and practical experience could not entirely be replaced by online means and that technical difficulties and problems ascertaining the reliability of information is a concern. In concluding, UK Coaching suggested that those developing online methods of education should seek to explore what it is that makes learning engaging and how they can make these resources interactive. You can read their full report here.

In conclusion it appears the appetite for using online technologies to learn to develop is a healthy one (and one presumably you can relate to if you are reading this!) Indeed the technologies available appear to satisfy many coaches' needs in relation to engaging in their preferred learning in non-formal ways and informal ways.

A number of challenges remain however, in order to ensure online coach education is an effective learning environment to meet coach development needs, including ensuring that coaches have the skills to assess the quality of information and finding ways to ensure materials are interactive and engaging to the learner.

In order to address some of this questions that arise from this work, my team and I at Canterbury Christ Church University have opened a survey to further explore what coaches find engaging about the online resources they use and welcome suggestions on how the resources you use might be made more interactive and engaging. We will be sharing this research at a later date including on ConnectedCoaches.

The survey takes no more than 10 minutes to complete and can be found here. Thank you in advance for completing ☐.

Please note: In accordance with the participation guidelines this blog has been published with the consent of the Community Manager.

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