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## COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN NON-COMPETITIVE CONTEXT: CASE STUDY IN A MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL

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During the last two decades, the coach-athlete relationship has been the theme of many research programs (Serpa, 1995). Leadership theory has been materialised in the form of the LSS-questionnaire (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978) and inspired several authors. Most of these studies revealed that coaches and athletes do not have the same perception about coaches' actual leadership behaviours. Such discrepancies could lead to conflicts and need to be studied by using a qualitative approach. Indeed, the coach-athlete relationship has frequently been studied regardless of the context within it occurs rather than as part of multiple relationships between members of sport organisations. Yin (1990) suggested that case study is an appropriate research design to "*investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context*" (p. 23). Two sociological theories have caught our attention to describe and explain relationships within organisations: (1) Crozier and Friedberg (1977) considered human relationships with reference to the power that involved people are looking for while abiding by constraints due to social context; (2) Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) characterised the justifications used by workers to resolve conflicts and to produce compromises within companies. These two models could be used jointly to identify strategies and conditions of agreement within coach-athlete dyads as well as with other partners in specific situations. This case study was part of a larger research program designed to compare coach-athlete relationships in several contexts. The main question here lay in the development of relationships between instructors and sportsmen or -women in a non-competitive context.

The selected martial art school conformed to criteria of context. One instructor, called Sensei, proposed three martial arts to its 72 adult members: Aïki-Do (32), Aïki-Karate-Do (32) and Ninjutsu (22). Participants were divided into two recognisable groups: (1) black belts who assisted the instructor and (2) lower level belts. We first conducted a survey to select relevant subjects among members of two groups and three martial arts. The questionnaire was inspired by the ERIS-questionnaire (Losier & Vallerand, 1995), the reciprocal dimension of interpersonal behaviours (Carron & Benett, 1977) and the classification of competencies (Donnadieu & Denimal, 1994). Results were used to determine a rank order of subjects to be submitted to open-ended interviews. Questions were about answers to the questionnaire and perception of variables coming from the sociological models that we adopted. Answers involving individuals could lead to modifications in the rank order. After 11 in-depth interviews, we went on collecting data with explanatory interviews (Vermersch & Maurel, 1997) helping the instructor and the most relevant subjects to describe what they actually lived during the sessions filmed maximum 48 hours earlier. Videotapes allowed to select centres of interest to focus interviews on. Subjects are presented in table 1. To situate the school compared with official martial arts federations, we also interviewed the regional sport administration's technical adviser. Data was analysed

using two different approaches: paradigmatic analysis and narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Paradigmatic analysis consisted in characterising conflicts and compromises with the aid of Boltanski & Thévenot's categories. Justifications provided by subjects during interviews were classified according to these authors' six worlds: inspiration, domestic, opinion, civic, trade and industrial. We used narrative analysis to associate strategies and social constraints which determine relationships between Sensei, assistants and lower level belts participants within the school. We ended that process by submitting collected data to concerned subjects to record their reactions and validate the interpretation of data.

Table 1. Subjects

| Subject  | Sex | Age      | Experience | Martial art                           | Belt  | Open-ended interview | Explanatory interview |
|----------|-----|----------|------------|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Sensei   | M   | 53 years | 39 years   | Aïki-Do<br>Aïki-Karate-Do<br>Ninjutsu | 2nd Dan<br>4 <sup>th</sup> Dan<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Dan | X                    | XXX                   |
| Pierre   | M   | 29       | 15         | Aïki-Do<br>Aïki-Karate-Do<br>Ninjutsu | 2nd Dan<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Dan<br>None                | X                    | X                     |
| Philippe | M   | 30       | 16         | Aïki-Karate-Do                        | 2nd Dan   | X                    | X                     |
| Maurice  | M   | 45       | 10         | Aïki-Do                               | 1 <sup>st</sup> Dan                                   | X                    |                       |
| Michelle | F   | 40       | 15         | Aïki-Do                               | 2nd Dan   | X                    | X                     |
| Josette  | F   | 60       | 15         | Aïki-Karate-Do                        | 1 <sup>st</sup> Dan                                   | X                    |                       |
| François | M   | 21       | 4          | Ninjutsu                              | Blue  | X                    | X                     |
| Axel     | M   | 18       | 1,1        | Aïki-Karate-Do<br>Ninjutsu            | Green<br>Yellow                                       | X                    | X                     |
| Boniface | M   | 18       | 1,5        | Aïki-Do<br>Aïki-Karate-Do             | Green<br>Green  | X                    |                       |
| Chantal  | F   | 16       | 1          | Aïki-Do<br>Aïki-Karate-Do             | Green<br>Orange                                       | X                    | X                     |
| Joseph   | M   | 44       | 22         | Aïki-Karate-Do<br>Ninjutsu            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Dan<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Dan            | X                    |                       |

Results showed that all subjects shared the same ideal of non-competitive confrontation so that novices who wanted to compete rapidly dropped out. Experience and tradition were the main resources that Sensei used to teach martial arts. He frequently referred to personal practice of various martial arts styles to legitimate the school's particular style. Aïki-Karate-Do consisted in an innovative combination of Aïki-Do and Karate techniques. Tradition was materialised in the form of rituals before, during and after practice sessions, but also existed in the hierarchical nature of relationships. Black belt participants handed down to lower level belt participants knowledge that they learned from Sensei. Learners were just asked to trust teachers and to work hard. It explained why disagreements and even suggestions were never expressed in front of Sensei. Some characteristic strategies are worth explaining. During interview, Pierre systematically answered in agreement with Sensei's ideas. Everyone in the school considered Pierre as Sensei's successor; it seems

logical that this status did not allow him to express disagreements. Criticising the school's policy would be equivalent for Pierre to devalue his succession to Sensei. In general, interviews revealed only minimal disagreements among subjects. These were mainly about physical confrontation or appropriateness of warm-ups. Some would prefer to experiment tougher techniques while others expressed fears to confront with brutal partners. In the second case, two different strategies were pointed out according to gender. Women discussed with rough partners and gave their femininity as a reason. Age was also a women's argument. For example, Sensei used it to exempt Josette from performing hardest exercises. Conversely, men tried to avoid undesirable partners during turnover rather than complaining. Complaints would be equivalent for them to accept that their belt was not representative of their actual level. Warm-ups were sometimes considered quite hard and maybe traumatising. Tradition seemed to be the most important criteria to respect. We categorised most of justifications for disagreements in four worlds: (1) domestic: tradition, hierarchy, etc.; (2) industrial: knowledge in training and traumatology, etc.; (3) inspiration: innovation, experimentation, etc. and (4) trade: competition, money, etc. (Table 2). On one hand, justifications indicating the first three worlds were expressed during interviews. On the other hand, many indicators revealed that the trade world was discredited in this school and subjects never took advantage of arguments related to the fourth world. Consequently, compromises with competition seem impossible except dropping out. We consider that disagreements about Sensei's martial arts style can only lead to local agreements such as frequenting at the same time another school as Joseph did. Finally, we noted that Sensei adapt tradition in his own way, for example in combining Aiki-Do and Karate. Thus, we think that compromise could be obtained in adaptation of warm-ups to scientific training theories so that injuries could be better prevented. It would be that much easier since a physical education student figures among assistants.

Table 2. Justifications of disagreements

| Disagreement              | Teacher's worlds                               | Learner's worlds                                    | Consequences  |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Novices want to compete   | Domestic (tradition) and Inspiration (the Way) | Trade (competition)                                 | Dropping out  |
| Warm-ups are not healthy  | Domestic (tradition)                           | Industrial (knowledge in training and traumatology) | Agreement based on typically domestic argument: "What comes down through the ages may not be bad" |
| Karate is not traditional | Inspiration (Aiki-karate-Do)                   | Domestic (tradition)                                | Local agreement in the form of partial dissidence   |

Non-competitive practice is not only a policy choice by the instructor but directly coming within the framework of a certain tradition. Relationships between all the people who attend this school were mainly based on this tradition. Disagreements arose essentially from personal interpretations of tradition and mediation by the instructor. Indeed, tradition is differently followed in official martial arts federations. The two sociological theories jointly used allowed to differentiate problems: (1) some irremediably led to dropping out; (2) others were the object of local agreements depending of the concerned subjects; (3) concrete disagreements such those between traditional and scientific training could potentially be resolved by intervention aiming to establish lasting compromises.

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