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# Phronetic social science: a means of better researching and analysing coaching?

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The aim of this paper is to present the case for phronetic social science (Flyvbjerg, 2001) as an appropriate lens through which to view sports coaching. In doing so, we firstly define and then elaborate upon the principal concepts contained within phronetic social science as related to complex action, flexibility, moral reflection and power. By locating them within recent coaching research, the case is further made how such concepts can help coaching scholars and coaches to better understand the activity of coaching. Finally, a conclusion draws together the main points made, particularly in terms of how using such a perspective and conceptualisation of coaching could benefit future coach education programmes.

**Keywords:** *Coaching; Phronetic social science; Bent Flyvbjerg*

## Introduction

In contrast to the traditional functional conceptualisation of sports coaching as an efficient, operational process (see Cushion *et al.*, 2003, for a fuller critique), recent studies have positioned the activity as a complex social system, where knowledge is produced on the basis of coaches' everyday interactions within a particular socio-cultural context (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones, 2007). Such work has highlighted the importance of practice, and of reflective thought upon that practice, in catalysing coach learning and development (Schön, 1983, 1987; Jones *et al.*, 2004). For example, Saury and Durand (1998) and Jones *et al.* (2004) among others concluded that expert coaches invest much of themselves in or vicariously 'live' their training sessions, reflecting the use of an implicit form of knowledge strongly tied to past experiences and the people they are. In doing so, such coaches were found to be principled yet flexible, retaining the ability through careful judgement and consideration to adapt their practice to new, unexpected and problematic tasks (Jones & Standage, 2006). In this respect, the coaches' knowledge and actions were neither complete nor absolute, but highly individual and ever evolving (Cushion *et al.*, 2003).

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Coaches' knowledge then, has come to be seen as largely experience-linked and situation-specific; as both the 'product and manifestation of personally experienced involvement' (Saury & Durand, 1998, p. 12). It is a position further theorised by the recent work of Jones and Wallace (2005) who postulated that, because it is beyond the capacity of any coach to achieve full predictable control over the coaching process, effective practice is built on learning to cope with an irreducible degree of ambiguity and pathos that are endemic to the coaching endeavour. Such a strategy is not to admit defeat to the forces of unbridled relativity and anarchy and simply hope for the best (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Rather it is to accept a degree of uncertainty and, in Schön's (1983, 1987) terminology, to build a repertoire that involves judgements and decisions 'made in the manner of a virtuoso social actor' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 2). Coaching then, far from being rational and sequential, demands constant and constructive deliberation, judgement and praxis, particularly in relation to values and power (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Despite this recognition, little ground has been made in proposing an appropriate reality-based interdisciplinary approach to take account of this complexity (Bowes & Jones, 2006). Indeed, even the recent call for more holistic theoretical perspectives to analyse coaching may be somewhat criticised in terms of trying to consider 'everything' within one superior framework, thus being in danger of reducing something very complex to something one-dimensional (Sørhaug, 1996). Similarly, it has been argued that although a pluralistic perspective possesses the adaptability to embrace the complexity of coaching, such flexibility also has some constraints (Rosenberg, 1995). For example, if all knowledge is taken as being contingent then it is necessarily in flux, allowing little appreciation for regularities in social life (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). On the other hand, a preoccupation with evidence-based practice across the pedagogical professions has undermined any standing given to practitioners' professional wisdom in dealing with problems created by power contextualities and the ubiquities of interactions (Standal, 2008). What appears to be at work here is something akin to a 'Cartesian anxiety' where a definitive position is encouraged. It is an artificial dualism which, although easy to think with, bears little resemblance to actual phenomena (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Flyvbjerg, 2001). The task has been made all the more difficult by the general clamour for 'clean', quick-fix answers particularly from the coaching professional preparation community, which inevitably reduces behaviour into decontextualised individual episodes. It is a call which has not served practitioners well, as it has effectively limited their 'judgements in [ways that are] sensitive and relevant to their own contextualised settings' (Biesta, 2007, p. 5).

The aim of this paper is to present the case for phronetic social science as developed by Flyvbjerg (2001) as a means through which the theory-practice gap in sports coaching can be addressed. We argue that such a stance, taking its lead from the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, can better take account of the social intuition and complexity of coaching than many of the perspectives used to date. It can do so through its recognition of social practice as the product of context-dependent tacit skills, which allows greater clarification of the 'the problems, risks and possibilities we

face' in social interaction, particularly when we need to directly influence others (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 4). The theory–practice dualism criticised by phronesis is addressed through a primary emphasis on contextualism, and how to manage particular problematic situations for the good of all (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The purpose, however, is to not propose that such analysis should totally replace others per se, but to raise awareness of additional ways in which we can, and perhaps should, study and analyse the actions which comprise coaching. In this respect, we argue that phronesis is not necessarily better social science than other approaches in itself, but that it holds the potential to give us an improved coaching science, because it explicitly sets out to examine and unearth the nuanced everyday know-how and wisdom of practitioners.

An important methodological criterion of good research within social sciences is connected to the ability to uncover the meanings behind social processes. This includes an appreciation of both commonalities and uniquenesses within contextual interactions, what Bourdieu (1990) called a 'feel for the game'. In so doing, recognition needs to be paid to both structural analyses and actors' agency in near equal amounts; a position which echoes the work of Geertz (1973) who classically incorporated practices and symbols from the larger Balinese social and cultural world to shed light on the seemingly localised event of a cockfight (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Unfortunately, coaching, with a few notable exceptions has not been subject to such investigations. Indeed, in a recent comprehensive review by Gilbert and Trudel (2004) it was found that research on coaching during the period under study (1970–2001) had overwhelmingly been guided by a quantitative research epistemology. Although the balance has altered more recently towards qualitative investigations, much of the analysis remains positivistic and rational in nature. Little wonder that a practice–theory gap continues to exist within coaching, with practitioners regularly claiming their dominant knowledge sources to be experimental and implicit as opposed to explicit (Jones *et al.*, 2004; Chesterfield *et al.*, in press). The significance of the paper then lies in presenting the case for an enhanced blending of academic rigour with ecological practical wisdom, as embodied in phronesis, so that the social complexity of coaching can be better taken account of (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In terms of structure, we firstly define and then elaborate upon the concepts contained within phronetic social science. This is followed by a discussion of how such concepts can help scholars, students and practitioners to better understand the activity of coaching. Finally, a conclusion draws together the main points made, particularly in terms of the relevancy of using such thinking within future coach education programmes.

### **Phronetic social science**

In his seminal text 'Making social science matter', Flyvbjerg (2001) suggested that we replace the view of social science as science, with its role as a generator of practical wisdom. His case stemmed from dissatisfaction at the dominant position of rationality within the social sciences, and their consequent inevitable inability to

address pressing social concerns. According to Flyvbjerg (2000, 2001), the natural scientific model has become so dominant that entire scholarly disciplines have been  
120 blinded to phenomena such as context, intuition and experience. However, he was quick to point out that his thesis was not an unfettered attack upon the positivistic approach, or to undermine the relevance of analysis and rationality as important concepts. Rather, for Flyvbjerg (2001), the ‘rational fallacy’ consisted of raising such concepts into the most important and dominating view of human activity.  
125 Alternatively, his stance was that judgement based on context, experience and personal values should be placed alongside rationality, thus somewhat redressing the current imbalance (Schram, 2004).

The roots of phronetic social science can be found in one of Aristotle’s three intellectual virtues. As opposed to *episteme*, which emphasised scientific theories and analysis, and *techne*, associated with production-orientated craft, *phronesis* was defined as a practical wisdom related to dealing ethically with context, practice and experience (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Although both *techne* and *phronesis* are grounded in the practical, the difference lies between making or producing knowledge and acting on that knowledge (Dunne, 1993). That is, while *techne* is concerned with the mechanical application of means to ends, *phronesis* ‘is a habit of attentiveness that makes one’s past experience flexibly available [while] allowing the present situation to unconceal its own particular significance’ (Dunne, 1993, p. 305). Despite presented arguments that within Aristotle’s thinking, the difference between *techne* and *phronesis* is perhaps not so clear-cut (Standal, 2008), the important point is that the ‘distinction grounds a significant difference between technical and moral modes of practical engagement with the world’ (Carr, 2003, p. 258; for a fuller discussion of the distinction between *techne* and *phronesis*, see Standal, 2008). At the heart of Flyvbjerg’s phronetic concept then, lies a virtuous practical value rationality which refers to a reflective analysis on personal-value judgements in relation to future actions. In this respect, it involves a shift from instrumentality to a deliberation over what constitutes ethical praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2000, 2001). The person possessing practical wisdom is deemed to have knowledge of how to manage each particular situation; an expertise which can never be reduced to general truths (Flyvbjerg, 2001). However, in ensuring to avoid total relativism (*techne*) as much as rule-based objectivity (*episteme*), Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 49) concluded that ‘there are rules and there is the particular’, replacing the either–or traditional dichotomy with a both–and approach. Acknowledgement is also made that an individual is never standing over and objectively observing a situation, but rather is heavily involved in it. Such knowledge is also linked to practical ethics, thus maintaining flexibility within given carefully considered boundaries about what is good and advantageous both to the individual and the social collective. Phronetic thinking then is concerned with deliberation about values and interests, as a precursor for action (Flyvbjerg, 2001).  
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Flyvbjerg’s (2000, 2001) approach encourages us to move beyond the purely technical into discussions concerning the practical knowledge of *knowing how* in relation to the theoretical knowledge of *knowing that* (Dewey, 1910; Ryle, 1945). Such thinking can be linked to that of the pragmatist William James, who

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distinguished the theoretical *knowledge about* from the practical *knowledge from* (Smith, 1998). Phronesis, therefore, is founded on the notion that the principal purpose of social scientific inquiry is not to develop theory per se, but to contribute to society's practice and workings (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Flyvbjerg concluded that this has profound implications for social-science inquiry, as such expert or tacitly developed competencies deny traditional clarification. Indeed, following the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), who argued that context and judgement were irreducibly central to understanding human action, Flyvbjerg believed that as an individual progresses from beginning to advanced skills, behaviour becomes increasingly intuitive and situation-dependent rather than rule-governed; the development of a kind of concurrent know-how. Such know-how is grounded in an assortment of implicit dexterity gathered from numerous experiences and a multiplicity of cases. It is here, in the field of practical competence based on highly nuanced, context sensitive tacit skills and their ethical application, that the essence of phronesis lies. It is a perspective concerned with particulars, with how to act 'well' in specific situations.

Building on Foucault's belief that inquiry about society can only be complete if it deals with issues of power, Flyvbjerg (2001) developed the classic concept of *phronesis* to a more contemporary, power-inclusive one. Within Flyvbjerg's phronesis, power is seen as productive and positive as well as restrictive; and as an opaque network of omnipresent relations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Power is also considered as being intertwined with knowledge and 'truth'. A central subsequent question within this conceptualisation of phronesis relates not only to who has power and why they have it, but also to how power is exercised particularly at the micro level ('power is studied ... in small questions', Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 376). The resultant focus is on process in addition to structure (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This kind of approach endows us with the possibility to become aware of both oppressive and satisfying social arrangements. Such arrangements, however, are not simply seen as dichotomous. For example, for Flyvbjerg (2001), the suppression of conflict equates to the suppression of freedom, because the privilege to engage in conflict and to struggle for power is part of freedom. For Flyvbjerg then, as for Foucault, power cannot be simply acquired, given or taken; neither do power relations exist externally to other relations. Rather, 'power comes from below', is dynamic, always subject to resistance and is inherently linked to discourses (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 121). Similarly, the Foucauldian concept of both the dominant and dominated entering into a complex dependent relationship where neither has absolute power, is adhered to.

Phronetic social science is about providing 'detailed narratives of how power works and with what consequences, and to suggest how power might be changed (to) work with other consequences' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 140). Hence, it is not only about learning the principles of action, but also applying such principles in the real world, in situations which could not have been foreseen. Such a position echoes Foucault's critique of value neutrality leading to the creation of the central ethical and power-dominated questions which both underpin phronetic social science and mark its distinctiveness from many other modes of inquiry. These questions include: 'Where

are we going?’ ‘Is this development desirable?’ ‘What, if anything, should be done?’ and ‘Who gains and who loses by which mechanism of power?’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Although Flyvbjerg (2001) believed that no one has the wisdom and experience to provide complete answers to such far reaching questions, the perspective of phronesis enables us to try. In this respect, it allows us to engage in an ongoing dialogue about the problems, possibilities and risks of coaching, particularly as related to the power plays that happen within it, and perhaps how things may be done differently for the greater good. For Flyvbjerg, this is where the true value of the approach lies, in raising questions about values, theory, methods and data, about research fundings and editorial biases towards historically privileged conceptions of investigative questions and solutions (McNamee, 2005).

This ethical applied edge, in common with some other post-modern approaches, forms the cornerstone of phronesis, with the aim being not only to describe the world, but also to provide positive guidance about the way things ought to be within it. Indeed, according to Schram and Caterino (2006), the outstanding facet of Flyvbjerg’s challenge is the way he transgresses disciplinary boundaries to make a compelling call for a social science that people can use to make a difference in their lives. The change is proposed to come about through enlightened reflection on actions and existing values, leading to an improved ‘practical understanding’ (Forester, 1999).

Although the phronetic concept has been criticised in relation to the under-theorisation of the ethical element, there is no doubt regarding Flyvbjerg’s intention for phronesis to include a strong moral or value-reflective component, thus comprising a programme for political action. The ethics referred to are those ‘in relation to social and political praxis . . . the relationship you have with society when you act’ (p. 55). What are at stake here are the interests of social commentary and social action in terms of the fundamental values-related questions of ‘Where are we going?’ and ‘Is it desirable?’. For example, it is not enough to know that one should be honest in dealing with others, as being honest without judgement and deliberation can lead to pain, offence and the breakdown of relationships. Asking such value-related questions then, does not assume a linear development, as the credence Flyvbjerg’s phronesis gives to power ensures an awareness that progress is often complex, transient and negotiated. It is here, of course, that the element of practical wisdom comes to the fore. Phronesis then, represents value judgements about what are ‘good and bad for man’; a stance which positions the reflexive analysis ‘of values and interests’ as a prerequisite for enlightened social, political and cultural development (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 3). In this respect, as mentioned earlier, and in departing from much social scientific inquiry, Flyvbjerg (2001) takes care to avoid the unconditional relativism associated with post-modernism and the grand theorising advocated by a natural scientific approach, replacing them with the hermeneutic notion of ‘contextualism, that is, situational ethics’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 130). This does not mean the abdication of ethical responsibility to idiosyncratic personal preference. Rather, that our value-based questions be judged in terms of the moral collective climate or common view among the group or culture under study

(Flyvbjerg, 2006). Indeed, for Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 375), 'sociality and history is the only solid foundation we have, the only solid ground under our feet'.

If phronetic social science is about the development of practical social action dealing with deliberation, judgements and praxis in relation to values and power (Flyvbjerg, 2001), what sort of methods does it advocate? Primarily, it calls for the provision of concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work. Through such gathered insights it is postulated that we can clarify and deliberate about the problems, possibilities and risks that we face before outlining how things could be done differently. Consequently, inspired by Foucault's 'power of example', case studies are crucial for phronetic research, because they produce precisely the type of context-dependent knowledge which makes it possible to move from rule-based, context-independent rationality to experience-based, situationally driven action. The point here is that value and human behaviour must be seen in relation to the particular, and that tacit sense and knowledge result from values, choice and judgement (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

In terms of particular methods espoused, echoing complexity theory (e.g. Bowes & Jones, 2006), phronetic social science looks for the great within the small, believing that small questions lead to big answers. Hence, it emphasises the particular before the universal, requiring researchers to 'focus on the minutiae', to get close to the field. Little wonder then that Geertz's 'thick description' is given a central role, echoing the tenets of hermeneutic and phenomenological perspectives (Flyvbjerg, 2001). As opposed to only observing, however, the approach also obligates investigators to enter into conversations and discussion with those being studied during all aspects of the research process; to help the latter address fundamental questions related to direction, power and values. Within phronetic social science then, context comes before theory, cases before samples and dialogue before final answers leading to social action in addition to social understanding (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Although one could argue that such an approach is not unique to phronetic research, the progress made by Flyvbjerg lies not in the issue of precise methodology, but in his belief about the value of carefully examining social actors' contextual deliberation, judgement and praxis in relation to the key value questions outlined previously (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

### **Researching coaching as complex social system: how phronetic social science can help**

What then can phronetic social science offer sports coaching? We believe it can offer much, not least because empirical findings have begun to implicate key phronetic concepts such as complexity, flexibility, morality and power within coaching. Consequently, it would appear that phronesis holds the potential to exist as an insightful over-arching framework through which coaching can be interrogated. This is not only in terms of analysing and understanding coaching as an adaptable activity capable of responding to circumstantial factors, but also as one heavily influenced by



the environment and culture within which it occurs. For example, the coaches interviewed by Jones *et al.* (2004) emphasised the importance of reacting to situational variables and events; not to be too dogmatic or rigid in their approach. Similarly, Saury and Durand (1998) found that elite sailing coaches' practice was heavily characterised by constant reactions and decision-making to unforeseeable situational events: a 'continuous step-by-step tuning to the context' (Saury & Durand, 1998, p. 264). Comparable conclusions were also drawn by Sève and Durand (1999) and others (e.g. Sève *et al.*, 2003; Hauw & Durand, 2005) who found that the actions of expert top-level coaches were not planned in advance, but comprised adaptations to cognitive anticipations and situational happenings.

Such flexible reactions, however, do not imply unfettered responses from an unlimited range of options. Rather, that the reactive actions of coaches were bound and enabled by the wider culture within which they took place. For example, although the coaches researched in Cushion and Jones' (2006) study cited the need to treat situations on their merits, their largely autocratic responses were subsequently dictated by their past experiences and what they generally thought the players expected from them. Similar findings were reported by d'Arripe-Longueville *et al.* (2001) in their work with elite French judo coaches. Here, the coaches' actions were largely directed by their perceived need to continually re-establish authority over the players. Such conclusions echo those of Bowes and Jones (2006) about the nature of coaching as having individual agency within personal relational schemata of how one should act in context. It is a view which positions coaching as, although possessing a considerable amount of freedom, being nevertheless rooted in the wider culture in which it occurs. Similarly, Mayer-Kress (2001) and Passos *et al.* (2008) located coaching as occurring at or near the so-called 'edge of chaos', a dynamic zone which exists neither in a state of complete stability nor total flux (Sonsino & Moore, 2001; Bowes & Jones, 2006). Such a zone carries echoes of Flyvbjerg's bounded value rationality, within which the everyday dance of agency occurs.

Recent work has also conceptualised coaching as a moral activity (Jones *et al.*, 2008a). Building on earlier work arguing that coaches should be guided by a virtues perspective (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004), Jones *et al.* (2008a) put forward the case that participation in sport is founded on central principles such as fairness, where encounters with ideals of 'fair play' and a 'level playing field' abound. Hence, coaches play (or should play) a pivotal role in developing a moral context; that is, to ensure that the moral encounters inherent within sport 'go well rather than badly' for their charges (Jones *et al.*, 2008a). They further argued that coaches' moral responsibilities extend beyond policing foul play and the like 'to the fostering and cultivation of certain virtues' at all levels of sport (Jones *et al.*, 2008a). Following Carr (1998) and McNamee (1998), the point is made that a recourse to a rigid rule-based approach or absolute relativism merely 'abdicates responsibility towards improving practice' (Jones *et al.*, 2008a). Rather, what required is principled reflection, informed by a virtuous perspective, on the nature of coaching practice for the good of all concerned. It is a position founded on Dewey's (1938/1997) perception of a pedagogue as one who should always be alert to see what attitudes and habits are

335 being created and reinforced in context, to discriminate between experiences that are  
educative and mis-educative, and to be able to judge what attitudes are actually  
340 conductive to continued growth.

Such work resonates with that of Jones and colleagues (Jones *et al.*, 2004, 2008b)  
who, informed by the writings of Goffman (1959), posited that coaches use a  
345 number of strategic actions constructed to save 'face' of both themselves and their  
athletes; actions driven by the greater good of all concerned. Although such coaches'  
practice was characterised by flexibility, it was also founded on a moral framework  
with some core beliefs being more significant than other peripheral ones (Blasi &  
Oresick, 1987). In this way, strong principles could be held while simultaneously  
350 treating others flexibly (Cassidy *et al.*, 2004). In a similar vein, Stelter (2007) argued  
that coaches need to create the possibility for reflection and understanding in athletes  
through stimulating a process of personal meaning-making for them. Finally in this  
context, Malloy and Rossow-Kimball (2007) argued that Plato's *Sophist* was a  
relevant concept through which to view coaching. Here, it was argued that coaches  
were more than technical conveyers of skill; rather they should be viewed as  
'philosopher therapists' in developing athletes' self-awareness. It is a stance which  
355 further positions coaches, in line with phronesis, as moral actors in influencing  
others' actions.

Current research has also described coaching as a power-ridden activity (e.g. Jones  
*et al.*, 2004; Potrac *et al.*, 2007). For example, Cassidy *et al.* (2004) outlined how  
360 coaches often utilise French and Raven's (1959) classic bases of social power,  
including legitimate, informational, positional, expert, coercive and referent power  
sources to keep sway and influence over athletes and other contextual stakeholders.  
Furthermore, Cushion and Jones (2006) found that coaches constantly revoked their  
contextually relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) in an attempt to maintain  
365 respect, while Denison (2007) focussed on how coaches use knowledge to produce  
disciplined docile bodies that can be regulated (by the self as well as others) in terms  
of time and space. Similarly, Jones *et al.*'s (2005) work with Anne, a former elite  
swimmer, illustrated how the potency of her coach's power led to drastic action on  
her behalf in terms of her own self-surveillance. For such authors, the coaching  
context is one inherently intertwined with issues of power, dominance and  
compliance, with power viewed as both a liberating and constraining influence on  
action. Such beliefs were also echoed in Purdy *et al.*'s (2008) work on elite rowing  
370 coaches. The results here suggested that power within coaching is always a mix of  
authority and dependence, as even the powerful (e.g. coaches) depend on the less  
powerful (e.g. athletes) to carry out certain practices. The work of Jones *et al.*  
(2008b) has also indicated how coaches' micro strategies are heavily influenced by  
power considerations; particularly in terms of the front they portray to athletes in  
order to secure the latter's respect and subsequent acquiescence. In this respect, they  
375 concluded that coaching was more akin to an obligation-ridden social activity than an  
uncluttered world of free-floating heroes and villains (Stones, 1998).

### Concluding thoughts

No doubt investigative work has begun to conceive of coaching as a complex, moral activity, heavily imbued with issues of power. It is through these constraints that the 'practical wisdom' of coaches is seen to emerge; a wisdom founded on principled personal reflection on practice (Jones *et al.*, 2003). Such a conceptualisation and accompanying workings, however, need to be further researched, questioned and evaluated in detail, as it is in these micro interactions that we believe excellence emerges. Here, Gardiner's (2000) project on everyday life can become an insightful guide, where the 'warm stream' of creative, apparently instinctive, speculation gets equal billing with the 'cold stream' of logical action. In this way, greater credence is given to the inherent ambivalences, dilemmas and non-logical logics of real-life coaching practice (Gardiner, 2000).

Taking a lead from such a perspective and earlier cited findings, we believe that better ways of researching coaching need to be found in order to develop more realistic and nuanced future coach education programmes. Phronesis, although still maturing in many ways as a social-science theory (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Geertz, 2001), is one such means through which this goal can be realised. It can do as it relates to uncovering, in all its micro detail, why the world is the way it is, so that we can change it for the better. This, of course, involves an exploration into the 'dark side' or social life (Hoyle, 1982), to the manipulations of those who comprise coaching towards desired ends. Echoing Flyvbjerg's belief, we also consider that, phronesis is commonly seen in social practice. Hence, to reduce an examination of coaching to either episteme (scientific knowledge) or techne (technical knowledge) is misguided. Rather, phronesis is much better placed to delve into the context dependency of coaching, and the committed, ethical personal reflection on what is, and has been, seen. It also takes willing account of the situated messiness of the particular within social encounters (Schön, 1983, 1987), and how pedagogical decisions are based on finite understandings of actual circumstances (Gallagher, 1992). By adopting such a perspective, our judgement of coaches could be moved away from one purely done in terms of instrumental outcomes, to also include coaches' decisions in relation to the best interests of the individuals and the collective in their charge. Phronesis then, gives credence to Standal's (2008) recent call to 'celebrate the insecure practitioner'; to recognise and embrace the shifting sands on which coaching is built and to develop ways to cope with and thrive in the inescapable insecurity (Jones, 2006; Standal, 2008). In doing so, the 'patterns that connect' (Bateson, 1979) coaching practice and, hence, the practical wisdom (Flyvbjerg, 2001) of coaches, can be better understood and transmitted.

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