

## **New Science-Driven Strategies for Building Strong Coach-Athlete Relationships: Increase Retention, Wellbeing, and Performance**

*The evolving reach of psychometrics: Deep data in sports*

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This paper was presented at the American Football Coaches Association's 2024 Convention on January 9, 2024, in Nashville, Tennessee.

### Speakers

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**Abstract:** This paper was presented at a national conference discussing how coaches and staff can use psychometric assessments to understand their student-athletes better. The paper introduces a psychometric assessment that measures personality traits, needs, motivations, processing, decision making, and conflict management styles. Examples from a panel of experts are shared on how psychometrics can help coaches and staff improve retention and wellbeing and cultivate stronger coach-athlete relationships, leading to higher-performing teams. The experts discuss their experience of how deep insights into team members allow coaches to tailor their communication styles, provide targeted development opportunities, resolve conflicts more effectively, and create an environment where people feel safe speaking up about mental health concerns. The experts also discuss how psychometric assessments are a valuable way for organizations, coaches, and athletes to understand individual differences, effectively meet people's needs, and provide recommendations on the evolving uses of psychometrics in sports.

<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>THE WHY, WHAT, AND HOW OF COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS</b>
1. Deepen understanding of the evolving landscape of the coach-athlete relationship	High-performing coaches and trainers drive team performance
2. Foster a culture of continuous learning, growth and development	People-centric leadership capabilities are power skills that unlock potential
3. Leverage the power of psychometrics to gain deeper insights into coaches and athletes	Data-driven insights and deep data combine to drive high-impact behaviors

## INDUSTRY TRENDS

Let's start with some trends we see in the world of work. Emerging business practices, technological advances, and societal forces continue to transform the world of work.<sup>i</sup> As our needs shift to a more people-centered work life, so will work. And as work evolves, it is increasingly vital for organizations and leaders to prioritize employees' wellbeing while achieving results.

Influential leaders balance their team's needs with the organization's goals, resulting in high-performing teams. Leadership based on authenticity, empathy, and adaptivity supports a people-centric paradigm; leaders must move past doubt, fear, and uncertainty to develop a culture of alignment and connection.<sup>ii</sup> Leadership practices that create alignment and inspire cohesion, psychological safety, and trust are needed. But leading teams can be challenging; people are complex and require a nuanced leadership approach.

Steps leaders can take to support high-performing teams begin with alignment:

- Communicate the organization's purpose, values, and what it means for the team.
- Develop a collaborative team culture that's built on trust and fosters thriving.
- Act on people's needs while driving high performance and results.

Many leaders can benefit by being empowered to create environments where people can thrive, promoting wellbeing. What can help is a comprehensive starting point: A deep understanding of people driven by science. We're talking about people science, which is a deep understanding of people and organizations and how people relate with each other and perform. It relies on deep data, such as psychometrics and feedback. Over time, deep learning models adjust as new data are created, delivering rich, personalized insights.

The world of sports is no different. Coaches want to drive winning teams and maximize athletes' potential. To unlock athletes' potential, we must understand how people think and relate to each other, what they do, and their outcomes. Coaches assess athletes' potential often through observation and assessments.

The use of psychometrics in sports is not a new idea, but it may not be widely accessible.

However, it's not the assessment or its insights that drive change—the action taken is what matters.

## **Prism® Psychometrics**

Psychometrics is the science of measuring individual differences in psychological functions using standardized tests. This may include assessing personality traits, cognitive abilities, intelligence, emotional states, motivation, and other abilities to inform personalized learning and development and improve performance. Emerging evidence shows it can be a valuable tool for enhancing athletes' wellbeing.

Prism psychometrics gives coaches and trainers a deeper understanding of themselves and their athletes. Prism analyzes personality and changes that may occur under pressure, processing, decision making, conflict management styles, motivations, and fundamental needs. Prism assesses one's thinking and behavior (who people are and what they do). Prism can also explain how people relate to each other and uncover sources of tension or stress. Prism can improve communication between coaches and athletes. By understanding an athlete's personality, needs, motivation, and drive, coaches can better tailor their communication style to meet their needs. This can improve understanding, trust, and rapport, developing a stronger relationship between the coach and the athlete.

There are many ways that psychometrics can be used to improve one's wellbeing. For example, Prism can also help athletes develop coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and pressure and provide resources to address the sources of stress. Many athletes experience high levels of stress and pressure, which can lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression. Prism can help coaches and athletes identify the sources of their stress and develop healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with them. In addition, Prism can help athletes build relationships with others who understand what they are going through. Athletes struggling with mental health problems often feel isolated and alone. Prism can help connect athletes with other athletes who are going through similar experiences. This can provide support and encouragement, and it can help athletes to feel less alone.

## **SCIENCE-BACKED FRAMEWORK**

Cultivating emotional acumen and relational dynamics leads to better coaching and athletic outcomes. Our framework focuses on emotional, relational, and team intelligence (ERTi). Prism reveals comprehensive insights into nearly every aspect of ERTi. Coaches must build trust, foster positive relationships, enhance communication, avoid conflicts, motivate players, and get the best performance out of their teams. Coaches who develop self-awareness and understand athletes' needs are better equipped to build trust and psychological safety on the team.

Here are some of the benefits of emotional, relational, and team intelligence:

1. Coaches with high ERTi can better understand their own and their athletes' emotions, tailor feedback, and create an environment where athletes feel safe speaking up about mental health. This protects against burnout, which drives retention.
2. ERTi aids coaches in handling critical situations, improving decision-making, and enhancing coaching efficacy. By cultivating emotional intelligence and relational dynamics, coaches can also improve overall psychological wellbeing.
3. ERTi differentiates good coaches from extraordinary ones—it's a competitive advantage that enhances team performance.

## DEEP DIVE: STUDENT-ATHLETE WELLBEING

Psychological wellbeing is essential for coaches to understand and support their student-athletes. Mental health issues can significantly impact performance and quality of life if not adequately addressed. People-centric skills, whether it is ERTi or other models, can help make mental health a regular, open conversation between coaches and athletes. Here are the main messages to coaches about wellbeing:

1. Be aware of mental health issues in athletes and know the signs—break down stigmas around seeking help.
2. Take a proactive approach to mental health through training and promoting a positive team culture.
3. Build trust and communication with open dialogue about pressures and mental health—use tools like Prism to understand athletes.

Overall, psychometrics is a valuable tool that can be used to improve wellbeing. By improving communication between coaches and athletes, developing coping mechanisms for stress or crisis, and helping coaches and athletes improve their relationships, psychometrics can help create a more positive and supportive environment for athletes.

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Read our white paper,  
[\*\*\*Mental Health & the Student Athlete Experience\*\*\*](#),  
on supporting student athletes' mental health  
through coaching for more information.

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In summary, coaches who use Prism to understand themselves and their athletes better can improve their teams' retention, wellbeing, and performance.

Prism and the SurePeople platform build stronger coach-athlete relationships by:

- Enhancing self-awareness and emotional acumen
- Managing emotions and staying focused under pressure
- Identifying strengths & weaknesses and building personalized development plans
- Fostering positive relationships and resolving conflicts
- Creating a game-ready mindset and a positive team culture

## **THE EVOLVING REACH OF PSYCHOMETRICS**

Prism psychometrics offers valuable insights for talent evaluation, leadership development, onboarding, conflict resolution, and effective collaboration. For example, Prism can provide meaningful insights for talent evaluation to determine which candidates are best suited for the team. Prism can also assist with onboarding new athletes or staff by quickly highlighting their styles, preferences, and teamwork abilities, fostering team alignment, and building team chemistry. Leadership development programs can utilize Prism to help coaches, staff, and athletes recognize their strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities. During conflicts or impasses, Prism provides a nuanced perspective to help mediate and find solutions, boosting collaboration and trust. Lastly, reviewing participants' Prism portraits beforehand allows for more effective meetings by understanding differences in communication styles, motivations, and needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The SurePeople platform helps coaches and athletes develop people-centric skills that enhance leadership capabilities, wellbeing, and performance. Beyond this, the SurePeople platform enables coaches, staff, and student-athletes to navigate the critical phases of an athlete's experience. While many good instruments are on the market, we encourage you to find ones that best support your teams and organizations.

## ABOUT SUREPEOPLE

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SurePeople is a technology innovator dedicated to unlocking human potential. The Company's patented software platform integrates people science, powered by its Prism® psychometric algorithm, with the latest advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning.

SurePeople's solutions for sports organizations include the ultimate coaches' toolkit for maximizing athlete performance, fast-tracking athlete development, and improving talent acquisition analysis.

SurePeople's platform has been recognized for innovation and impact by leading research and analyst firms such as Brandon Hall Group, Deloitte Consulting, and Training Industry.

Learn more at <https://www.surepeople.com/sports/>.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.siop.org/Business-Resources/Top-10-Work-Trends>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/06-23-22-gartner-hr-research-identifies-human-leadership-as-the-next-evolution-of-leadership>