



# Perceived Organizational Climate and Performance Motivation of Swimming Coaches by Gender, Experience and Sports Performances

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## Abstract

The aim of our study is to investigate swimming coaches' performance motivation and perceived organizational climate by gender, experience and registered sport performance. The research involved 30 swimming coaches aged between 18 and 55 years, 15 male and 15 female, from several state and private sports clubs in Bucharest. In order to investigate swimming coaches' perceptions of organizational climate the ECO system was used (3 dimensions were studied: Leadership, Evaluation and Identification). The coaches' performance motivation was assessed through the Performance Motivation Questionnaire. The statistical analysis of the results revealed that male coaches are more motivated by their self-respect as a person, as an outcome of their sporting performance, and have a greater need for high salary. For swimming coaches having between 5 and 10 years of experience is more important (by comparison with others) that the work is stimulating, interesting, they are motivated to achieve outstanding performances by acquiring a high status in society, and they identify most with the sports organization they work in; coaches with less than 5 years of experience are more satisfied with the leadership style of managers, compared to more experienced coaches which are more dissatisfied with the way evaluation is carried out in the sports organizations. The study findings can be useful to develop recommendations for swimming coaches and other specialists involved in sport performance training.

**Keywords:** Swimming, Coaches, Motivation, Sports performance, Organizational climate

## Introduction

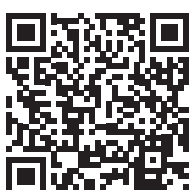
Performance symbolizes the result obtained by an individual or a group in an activity, the result obtained being generally a quantified form. Sporting performance is defined as a bio-psycho-social value achieved in an official competition, as the result of a capacity that is assessed on the basis of a set of rigorously established criteria.<sup>1</sup> Coaches' personality traits are essential and can boost or block athletes' performance. To know the personality traits of successful coaches, the following sources are particularly important: Predoiu,<sup>2</sup> Ciolcă,<sup>3</sup> Predoiu.<sup>4</sup> The performance motivation of coaches and the environment in which they work (e.g., the organizational climate

in the sports club) are, also, important elements influencing the quality of training and performance.

## Organizational climate

Organizational climate refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviours that characterize life in an organization.<sup>5</sup> Workplace climate plays a vital role in promoting employee creativity, leaders' behaviors being essential in exercising positive behavior at work. It is very important to match the goals of the organization with the interests and activities of the members of the organization in order to promote a supportive climate and organizational productivity.<sup>6</sup>

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An important factor in organizational climate is the support of managers. This support includes setting clear goals, commitment, trusting people, and dealing with external barriers.<sup>7</sup> If employees (coaches in the current study) perceive that the manager is supportive, they will be more willing to participate and get involved in different activities.

Studies have highlighted the mediating effects of innovative behaviour on the relationship between organizational climate and organizational performance.<sup>8</sup> Trust plays an important role in the innovation process, because in this case, ideas are seriously considered and used by the members of the organization. Manager-coach trust is an important predictor of job performance.<sup>9</sup> The following characteristics of the supportive climate are highlighted:<sup>10</sup> the manager is involved in defining and solving problems, provides and asks for information, behaves honestly with others without deceiving, is open to new information and interpretations, respects others and does not emphasize differences in status and power. In 2023, researchers (following a scoping review), noted the need for more studies addressing the organizational and motivational climate of coaches and the implications for performance in working with athletes.<sup>11</sup>

### Motivation and sports performance

In professional sport, motivation is a key factor in achieving athletic performance, without which athletes and coaches are unable to sustain the training effort. Stimulating motivation remains an art that the coach has the ability to accomplish.<sup>12</sup>

Coach motivation leaves its mark on the training climate, influencing coaching style and behavior.<sup>13</sup> The motivation of coaches is mainly due to the desire to achieve certain goals previously set. It is considered that the intensity of this aspiration is directly proportional to the efforts made by the coach. For increased effectiveness, the coach must rely on both internal and external factors that influence the level of his/her performance.<sup>14</sup> A motivated coach will do everything he/she can to maximize the productivity and performance because he/she knows the direct impact of his motivation on productivity.<sup>15</sup> The coach must ensure a positive motivational climate, possess a broad knowledge of training methods, instill enthusiasm in the coached, and work with the athletes and multidisciplinary team members towards the achievement of the set goals.<sup>16</sup> The coaches' performance motivation transfers to their athletes - the expectations of the specialists become the causes of the athletes' performance.<sup>17</sup>

Given that among the main reasons for dropout in sport (e.g., in swimming) are conflicts with the coach and the pressure felt due to the coach's actions,<sup>18</sup> it is imperative that the specialist is motivated to perform, but at the same time takes care of the athletes' mental health. Extrinsic motivation comes through positive and negative reinforcement (a reinforcement is something that increases the tendency to initiate a certain behavior.) These reinforcements can

be tangible, such as money or trophies, but one can notice, also, praise or public recognition.<sup>19</sup> Coaches need to be aware, however, that rewards can sometimes be counterproductive, as they can undermine intrinsic motivation<sup>20</sup> (they can reduce athletes' enjoyment of training if overused).

The Yerkes-Dodson law of motivation defines the balance that must exist between motivation and performance.<sup>21</sup> According to the Yerkes-Dodson law the relationship between motivation and performance (achieved in a task) takes the form of an inverted U - this implies that regardless of the task (including in sports field) there is a level of motivation that is below and a level of motivation that is above the level of motivation needed to achieve optimal performance. Therefore, a moderate level of arousal and motivation is, generally, recommended, in a complex task. However, performance is idiosyncratic, it differs from one athlete or coach to another, being important to pay attention, also, to the level of motivation that facilitates or not sports performance depending on the athlete (or coach).

### Scope

The aim of our study is to investigate swim coaches' performance motivation and perceived organizational climate in relation to gender, experience and sports performances.

### Objectives

- Identifying coaches' performance motivation taking into consideration their experience, gender and sports performance;
- Knowing coaches' perception of organizational climate (including effective leadership, organizational evaluation and organizational attachment/ identification), in relation to the above mentioned criteria.

### Research questions

1. What are the gender-related differences in swimming coaches in terms of performance motivation and perceived organizational climate?
2. Does swimming coaches' higher experience significantly influence their motivation for sports results, and the way the organizational climate is perceived?
3. What are the differences between swimming coaches having international/national performances and coaches having local/regional results, in terms of performance motivation and perceived organizational climate?

### Method

#### Participants

The study was attended by 30 swimming coaches aged between 18 and 55 years, 15 male and 15 female, from several public and

private sports clubs in Bucharest, Romania. The distribution of participants is as follows:

- 13 coaches with international/national performances (6 female and 7 male), and 17 coaches with local/regional level performances (9 female and 8 male);
- 9 coaches have experience between 0-5 years, 8 coaches between 5-10 years, while 13 coaches have more than 10 years of experience (each of the three groups includes coaches having international or national sports performances, local or regional results, both male and female).

## Measurements

### ECO system - organizational climate investigation<sup>22, 23</sup>

The ECO system was developed by Dr. Ticu Constantin, investigating employees' perceptions of 14 different dimensions of organizational climate. In the present research we addressed the following three dimensions: Leadership – effective leadership style, supporting individual and collective performance, ensuring conditions for efficiency (e.g., *Valuable ideas are accepted and appreciated by the managers*); Evaluation – evaluate employees' work, based on clear objectives and criteria, providing feedback and solutions to improve work (e.g., *I have been informed and know the criteria by which my work is evaluated*); Identification – the degree of identification with the organization, the extent to which employees share the aims and values of the organization, identify with its future, are loyal and interested in the smooth running of the organization (e.g., *I am proud to say that I work in this organization*).

Swimming coaches responded to the questionnaire items on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = "To a very small extent" and 5 = "To a very large extent". Eight items are noted for each examined dimension of organizational climate.

### The Performance motivation questionnaire (adapted from Predoiu, 2016)<sup>24</sup>

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = Not at all, 5 = Moderate, and 10 = Very much, please specify *What motivates you to obtain top sports performances with the athletes you train?* The items/motives are: 1. The higher salary; 2. The feeling that I am doing something important; 3. Achieving a higher status in the society; 4. The possibility to travel to different countries, locations; 5. The opportunity to continuously develop both personally and professionally; 6. I gain greater self-respect as a person (as I achieve higher levels of sporting performance); 7. Work is stimulating, interesting. Swimming coaches marked their response (from 1 to 10) for each of the 7 items/ motivations.

## Procedure

The research was conducted between March 2023 and June 2023. The questionnaires in our research were administered online via google forms. Ethical principles were ensured: written informed consent was obtained, participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, results were interpreted confidentially, anonymity was ensured.

## Cross-sectional design

The dependent variables (DVs) are represented by the swim coaches' results on performance motivation and for the investigated dimensions of organizational climate (Leadership, Evaluation and Identification). The variable that plays the role of the independent variable (IV) is the coaches' belonging to one of the formed groups (high performing vs. low performing coaches, male and female coaches, respectively more experienced vs. novice coaches).

## Results

In a first step we tested whether there are significant differences between male and female swimming coaches in terms of performance motivation and perceived organizational climate Table 1.

One can observe that male coaches have a greater need for high salary, are more motivated to gain self-respect as a person through their work (than female swimming coaches). At the same time, male coaches are more motivated (in their work) by the opportunity to travel and get to know other countries, as well as by the chance to develop and acquire a higher status in society. In achieving sporting performance, the feeling of accomplishment (*the feeling that I am doing something important*) is equally valued by coaches (regardless of gender).

Also, male swimming coaches identify slightly more with the organization in which they work, compared to female swimming coaches, while female coaches are slightly more satisfied with organizational leadership (as a dimension of organizational climate), compared to men. At the same time, male coaches (as opposed to female coaches) consider to a higher degree that the work in the sports organization is evaluated fairly, objectively, that tasks and feedback are clear, and that solutions are offered to improve the work.

A marginally significant difference ( $p = 0.057$ ) between coaches by gender ( $U = 67.5$ ) is observed for high salary. Male swimming coaches are more motivated to achieve outstanding sport performance by the financial factor as opposed to female swimming coaches. Although there are no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ) with respect to the other dimensions examined, we highlight the following aspects, which we consider of interest in the context of the present research Table 2:

**Table 1:** Gender-related results (M – Male coaches, F – Female coaches)

Variables	Min (M/F)	Max (M/F)	Range (M/F)	Mean (M/F)	SD (M/F)	SE (M/F)	CV (M/F)
Higher salary	5/ 1	10/ 10	5/ 9	7.26/ 5.2	1.94/ 2.85	0.50/ 0.73	0.26/ 0.54
I am doing something important	7/ 6	10/ 10	3/ 4	9.26/ 9.26	1.03/ 1.27	0.26/ 0.33	0.11/ 0.13
Higher status	3/ 1	10/ 10	7/ 9	7.53/ 6.6	1.99/ 2.19	0.51/ 0.56	0.26/ 0.33
The possibility to travel	2/ 1	10/ 10	8/ 9	7.26/ 6.6	2.40/ 2.55	0.62/ 0.66	0.33/ 0.38
I develop both personally and professionally	7/ 4	10/ 10	3/ 6	9.66/ 8.66	0.81/ 2.05	0.21/ 0.53	0.08/ 0.23
Greater self-respect	3/ 1	10/ 10	7/ 9	6.6/ 5.2	2.47/ 2.43	0.63/ 0.62	0.37/ 0.46
Work is stimulating, interesting.	7/ 2	10/ 10	3/ 8	9.13/ 8.33	1.18/ 2.19	0.30/ 0.56	0.12/ 0.26
Evaluation	14/ 12	39/ 40	25/ 28	34.26/ 32	7.60/ 8.74	1.96/ 2.25	0.22/ 0.28
Identification	18/ 8	40/ 40	22/ 32	32.53/ 32.3	5.62/ 9.62	1.77/ 2.48	0.21/ 0.29
Leadership	12/ 12	40/ 40	28/ 28	34/ 34.33	9.52/ 9.65	2.46/ 2.49	0.27/ 0.28

Note. SE: Standard error, CV: Coefficient of variation

**Table 2:** Gender-related results – Mann-Whitney test

	Mann-Whitney U	p
Higher salary	67.5	0.06
I am doing something important	107	0.81
Higher status	87	0.29
The possibility to travel	94.5	0.46
I develop both personally and professionally	85	0.17
Greater self-respect	79.5	0.14
Work is stimulating, interesting	85	0.24
Evaluation	72.5	0.1
Identification	101.5	0.66
Leadership	111.5	0.98

- male swimming coaches are more motivated by the self-esteem, as a person, felt as a result of the sports performance achieved, compared to female swimming coaches;

- male professionals are more satisfied by how the performance is evaluated in the sports organization in which they work, compared to female professionals.

Next, we checked the differences between swimming coaches taking into consideration their experience.

In Table 3 one can see that swimming coaches with more than 10 years of experience consider self-respect and the feeling that they do something important (when coaching) to be more important than coaches with less experience. Swimming coaches having between 5 and 10 years of experience are motivated (more than other coaches) by the salary, by the stimulating and interesting nature of the work carried out, and, also, are more motivated to obtain outstanding sports performances to achieve a higher status in society.

Moreover, swimming coaches having less than 5 years of experience are more satisfied with organizational leadership (tasks and objectives are clear, feedback is given constructively), with the leadership style of managers, compared to more experienced coaches. Swimming coaches with 5-10 years experience identify most with the sports organization they work in, and are, also, the most satisfied with the way evaluation is carried out within the organization.

The data analysis Table 4 emphasizes that there are no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ) between swim coaches' (regarding performance motivation and perceived organizational climate) based on experience. However, we highlight the following interesting differences:

- swim coaches with 5 to 10 years of experience are more motivated to perform better if the work is stimulating, interesting, compared to swim coaches with less than 5 years of experience;

- swimming coaches with more than 10 years of experience are more dissatisfied with the way in which the evaluation of employees is carried out in the sports organization where they work, compared to swimming coaches with less experience.

Not least, we were interested to verify whether there are significant differences between coaches taking into consideration their sports performances.

**Table 3:** Performance motivation and perceived organizational climate according to coaches' experience

Variables	Mean			SD		
	less than 5 years' experience	5 to 10 years experience	more than 10 years experience	less than 5 years' experience	5 to 10 years experience	more than 10 years experience
Higher salary	6.44	7.5	5.61	2.12	3.2	2.59
I am doing something important	8.33	9.37	9.53	1.3	1.4	0.77
Higher status	6.77	7.62	6.92	2.63	1.99	1.89
The possibility to travel	6.88	7.62	6.53	2.17	1.06	2.75
I develop both personally and professionally	8.77	9.75	9.07	2.22	0.7	1.55
Work is stimulating, interesting	7.88	9.5	8.84	2.47	0.75	1.51
Greater self-respect	6	4.87	6.46	2.87	2.53	2.22
Evaluation	33.55	34	30.38	5.76	8.92	9.51
Identification	31	34.25	32.3	9.35	8.73	7.53
Leadership	35.66	34.62	32.92	9.24	10.35	9.57

**Table 4:** Kruskal-Wallis test - Performance motivation and organizational climate by experience

Kruskal-Wallis (H) test	Comparison between the 3 groups of coaches: less than 5 years experience vs. between 5-10 years vs. more than 10 years experience		
	$\chi^2$	p	$\xi^2$
Higher salary	1.63	0.443	0.0562
I am doing something important	2.489	0.288	0.0858
Higher status	0.588	0.745	0.0203
The possibility to travel	0.589	0.745	0.0203
I develop both personally and professionally	1.555	0.459	0.0536
Work is stimulating, interesting	3.592	0.166	0.1239
Greater self-respect	1.968	0.374	0.0679
Evaluation	3.424	0.181	0.1181
Identification	1.564	0.457	0.0539
Leadership	1.882	0.39	0.0649

The value of U-test in the case of objective Evaluation of employee performance (organizational climate dimension) is 51.5. Since  $p = 0.014$ , we can conclude that the differences between swimming coaches with international/national sports performance and coaches with regional/local level results are significant. Professionals with outstanding performances are significantly more dissatisfied with the way their work is evaluated in the sports

club (in which they work) compared to coaches without top results. The effect size is  $r = 0.45$  (z-value is 2.44), showing moderate to strong differences<sup>25</sup> between the results of the two groups studied. There are no significant differences in the performance motivation of swimming coaches taking into consideration their sports results Table 6.



**Table 5:** Performance motivation and perceived organizational climate according to coaches' sports results

Variables	Mean		SD	
	I/N	L/R	I/N	L/R
Higher salary	5.76	6.58	2.8	2.5
I am doing something important	9.46	9.11	0.77	1.36
Higher status	6.92	7.17	1.75	2.4
The possibility to travel	6.92	6.94	2.21	2.7
I develop both personally and professionally	9.61	8.82	0.65	2.03
Work is stimulating, interesting	9.07	8.47	1.44	2
Greater self-respect	5.84	5.94	2.47	2.6
Evaluation	28	35.58	10.31	4.3
Identification	32.53	32.35	7.77	8.78
Leadership	31.46	36.29	11.05	7.65

Note. I/N: International/national performances; L/R: Local/regional sports results

**Table 6:** Mann-Whitney (U) test – results according to sports performance

	Mann-Whitney U	p
Higher salary	89	0.365
I am doing something important	104.5	0.789
Higher status	100.5	0.685
The possibility to travel	102	0.731
I develop both personally and professionally	102.5	0.698
Greater self-respect	105.5	0.835
Work is stimulating, interesting	86.5	0.299
Evaluation	51.5	0.014
Identification	109	0.966
Leadership	73.5	0.107

## Discussion

Motivation is an essential factor in achieving valuable results, both with regard to athletes and coaches. In the stressful environment of high performance sport,<sup>26</sup> coaches need to maintain a functional level of motivation to support their athletes. In the present research it was found that swim coaches with superior sports performances are motivated by the chance to develop personally and professionally through the work they do, as well as by the feeling that they do something important. One can observe an intrinsic motivation of top-performing swimming coaches. In contrast, less important motives for achieving outstanding sporting performance are self-respect (as a person) and high salary.

Swimming coaches with international/national level performances are less satisfied with the way evaluation is carried out within their sport organization (the difference is statistically significant), compared to coaches with regional/local performances. Also, high performers (coaches) are less

satisfied with the leadership style of the managers (compared to coaches having regional/local results). Although Satorre<sup>27</sup> found no significant relationship between "organizational climate and teachers' level of performance, organizational climate and the teachers' level of job satisfaction", in sports performance field we argue the importance of an organizational climate that is conducive to performance, conflict-free and innovative (in the mentioned study teachers in secondary schools were investigated). Selamat.<sup>28</sup> come to support this idea, researchers showing that organizational climate is a "significant factor that could affect teachers' job performance" (secondary school teachers were, also, examined). Principal's leadership behavior was found to be a critical factor in enhancing teachers' performance at the workplace.

In a previous study investigating the importance of organizational climate in swimming coaches (The ECO System was used), data analysis revealed that "female swim coaches perceived the tasks to be clearer within the sports organization in which they work, felt that there was more support from the organization's

management, that relationships with colleagues and, also, the reward/ motivational system were better, compared to the male swim coaches".<sup>29</sup> The findings in the current research advance knowledge, emphasizing that male swimming coaches identify slightly more with the organization in which they work compared to female coaches, while women swimming coaches are slightly more satisfied with organizational leadership (as a dimension of organizational climate) compared to men. The role of organizational attachment (the sense of belonging) in increasing performance has been emphasized in the literature.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, male coaches (as opposed to female coaches) are more likely to feel that the work in the sports organization is fairly, objectively evaluated (is important to mention that there were no significant gender-related differences in terms of perceived organizational climate). It seems that in a stressful situation (and in sports organizations stressful work situations are inevitable), the negative coping strategies "were inextricably linked to a higher aggression level, and were more prevailing in the case of females".<sup>31</sup> Further studies need to shed more light on the perceived organizational climate in the case of swimming coaches. The investigation of different psychological variables, such as grit, in relation to organizational climate, is very important. Researchers found that grit is positively linked with organizational performance, while supportive climate strengthens the relationship between grit and performance.<sup>32</sup>

The results showed that men (swimming coaches) have a greater need for high salary, are more motivated to gain self-respect as a person through their work (than women swimming coaches). The fact that swimming coaches in Romania are not sufficiently stimulated (in financial terms) was underlined in the literature.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, male coaches are more motivated (in their work) by the opportunity to travel and get to know other countries, as well as by the chance to develop and acquire a higher status in society.

In terms of experience, swimming coaches with more than 10 years' experience consider self-respect and the feeling of doing something important to be more valuable than coaches with less experience. Swimming coaches having between 5 and 10 years of experience are motivated (more than others) by a high salary, find stimulating, interesting work important, and are, also, motivated (at a higher level) to achieve outstanding performances by acquiring a high status in society. Also, swimming coaches with less than 5 years of experience are more satisfied with the leadership style of managers (tasks and objectives are clear, feedback is given in a constructive way), compared to more experienced coaches. Swimming coaches with 5-10 years experience identify most with the sports organization they work in, being, also, the most satisfied with the way evaluation is carried out within the sports club.

Sports managers should know practices to increase the coaches' well-being, and should be aware of the importance of having an organizational climate that is conducive to coaches' performance. The findings provide valuable information to sports managers

(and not only), which can intervene to increase the quality of life of swimming coaches, coaches representing "meaningful figures that play an important role in athletes' development, and can help athletes deal with their challenges and difficulties".<sup>34</sup>

The relative small number of participants represents a limitation of the research. Also, the results could be different in another setting (e.g. country or type of organization). Not least, the limits of explicit/ direct measures (questionnaires) was emphasized in the literature,<sup>35</sup> longitudinal studies being recommended to capture the dynamics of coaches' perceptions.

## Conclusion

In summary, swimming coaches with higher sports results (at international/national level) are motivated by the chance to develop personally and professionally through the activity they do, as well as by the feeling that they do something important. They are less satisfied with the leadership style of managers, and with the way evaluation is performed within the sports organizations in which they work (compared to swim coaches with regional/ local performances). Men swimming coaches have a greater need for high salary, are more motivated by the opportunity to travel and get to know other countries, by the chance to acquire a higher status in society (compared to women swimming coaches), and, not least, their performance motivation is based on the need for self-respect as a person. Swimming coaches (regardless of gender) having more than 10 years' experience consider self-respect and the feeling of doing something important to be more valuable than coaches with less experience. Swim coaches having between 5 and 10 years of experience are motivated (more than others) to achieve outstanding performances by acquiring a high status in society, they identify most with the sports organization they work in, being, also, the most satisfied with the way evaluation is carried out within the sports clubs. With respect to less experienced coaches (having less than 5 years of experience), they are the most satisfied with the leadership style of managers.

## Authors' Contributions

The last author has an equal contribution to the publication as the first author.

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## Conflicts of Interest

Regarding the publication of this article, the authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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