

Identifying Best Practice for Referee Decision Communication in Association and Rugby Union Football

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Abstract

This paper reports an investigation into elite referee communication behaviour in association football and rugby union football concerned with identifying and describing the core behavioural components and strategies thought essential for the fair and skilful communication of free kick and penalty decisions by elite referees. Two former international referees, two former international coaches along with one current elite referee and one current elite referee-coach were the participants in a study that adopted a microanalytical process. They provided expert video review and analysis of referee communication, in particular, on the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of communication episodes, giving brief reasons for their choice. The data were then subjected to content analysis. The results indicated seven primary interpersonal referee actions reflecting good practice each with associated behavioural descriptions: whistle; gaze; posture and movement; hand/arm signals; verbal explanation; control; style and composure; and time management. The following three characteristics of skilful referee decision communication practice also emerged from the data: to engage the offender/s attention and instigate a decision interaction episode; to project confidence in the decision made; and finally to promote the perception of the decision as fair and just. Results serve as a useful foundation model upon which specific referee decision communication skills training and research programmes could be further developed.

Introduction

Communicating an unpopular or difficult decision is a task that confronts most people during their lives. For some it forms a major part of their daily working routine. Medical practitioners are faced with the responsibility of informing patients and their relatives of life-threatening diagnoses (see Walsh, Girgisl & Sanson-Fisher, 1998); judges communicate decisions of guilt or innocence (see Blanck, 1993); and managers across a variety of work environments face the challenging task of reprimanding employees (see Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). The means by which a decision is communicated can have important psychosocial implications for the decision maker and its recipient. Social and organisational justice research, for example, has highlighted the particular significance decision communication plays in an overall evaluation of the decision-making process in terms of fairness (Bies & Moag, 1986; Bies, 1987).

For sports officials, the notions of impartiality and fairness are paramount. On a general level, referees have to operate within a framework provided by the 'law of the land'. For whilst it may be argued that in some instances sport becomes a 'moral holiday', it cannot become a 'legal vacation'. Referees are expected to act as witness, jury and judge in sporting contests. Mindful of the health, safety and welfare of participants, they are expected to control the play by applying rules and laws, and make judgments on rule infringements, appropriate sanctions (and perhaps even rewards), performance, time and score. They are also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that match participants observe the often woolly notion of the 'spirit of the game'. There are few other societal roles wherein an individual accepts the risk of being held accountable for decisions made with such frequency.

Notwithstanding this range of responsibilities, however, attribution of blame to match/competition officials for errors has become increasingly prevalent, especially in the broadcast media. There are, of course, instances of error by sports arbiters, and occasionally 'trial by video technology' ensues. Much more complex, and therefore difficult to challenge, is the assertion of unfairness that has occasionally been directed at referees. In elite level sport, with the livelihoods of players and coaches at stake, not to mention the careers of match officials, as well as the financial interests of share-holders, the media, sponsors, advertisers and others, the importance and transparency of fairness is critical to the perception about the integrity of sporting encounters.

In this paper the under-researched area of sports officiating is examined with respect to the modes of communication employed by referees and the linkages to perceptions of fairness. Academic and scholarly discourses are relatively few in number and narrow in scope, though there are notable exceptions (Dickson, 2000). Hence much of the material considered for contextualising the research problem is essentially applied in nature and grounded in the development of sports officials. Some of it is the product of the received wisdom of a 'practice community' of sports coaches and referees (see for example, Australian Coaching Council, 1996; Morrison & Robinson, 1996). Some more is informed by theoretical insight, but is intended to be practical in orientation rather than a conceptual exposition (for example, Anshel, 1989; Weinberg & Richardson, 1990).

An Applied Contextualisation

Referee Communication

The ramifications of refereeing decisions can have important implications for sport and officiating performance. Observers have increasingly recognised that the mishandling of decision communication can lead to stressful results for referees and match participants. Almost thirty years ago, Rainer Martens (1975) examined the non-verbal behaviour of referees and concluded that officials could foster both negative and positive behaviours in match participants. Later,

in a series of studies investigating the vulnerability of elite athletes to crisis during performance, Michael Bar-Eli, Noa Levy-Kolker, Joan Pie and Gershon Tenenbaum (1995) suggested that an athlete's psychological state during competition was associated closely with the perceived behavioural responses of officials. They indicated that when playing away, basketball players who received an unexpected 'call' against them (for example, a referee's decision to penalise a player for a rule violation) felt most vulnerable to experiencing a crisis state during performance. They suggested that referees should be made aware of how referee communication can impact on player performance, and further argued that through the effective use of verbal and non-verbal communication, referees could avoid amplifying, through unnecessary words or actions, the negative consequences of their decisions (Bar-Eli et al, 1995).

The integral role of communication within the refereeing process is well recognised (Anshel & Webb, 1991; Dickson, 2000; Evans, 1994). Robert Weinberg and Peggy Richardson (1990), for example, observed that outstanding officials clearly and consistently send the right messages. Indeed, they argued that the ability to communicate decisions with confidence, control, calmness, positive intensity and fairness are key skills in the refereeing process. Mark Anshel (1989) concurred and added that a referee who maintains a calm manner when communicating a decision in complex game situations conveys a sense of control and maturity to players. It is clear that referees require an awareness and understanding of interpersonal skills far beyond mere verbal ability. Hand signals, body language and spatial behaviour, whistle use and facial expressions can all contribute to effective referee decision communication practice (Australian Coaching Council, 1996; Baer, 1990; Evans, 1994; Steel, 1993). There is recognition in the officiating literature of the important role communication can play in the refereeing process, but there appears to be little empirically validated research to substantiate and inform current communication practice for referees.

Since the mid-1990s there has been increasing professionalisation of sports officiating. Accompanying this trend has been the need for referee development managers to recognise the importance of establishing and implementing in-service training programmes for referees at the elite level. Robert Bies (1990) argued that an official's education should be an ongoing process requiring advanced and specialised training far beyond a mere knowledge of the rules or laws. On an anecdotal level at least, it is reasonable to conclude that whilst refereeing bodies/associations have been good at training/instructing officials in the acquisition of rule knowledge, they have been far less effective in designing and implementing programmes to reflect the myriad of skills now recognised as essential for successful refereeing performance (Dickson, 2000).

The interpersonal skills associated with fair and skilful referee decision communication practice continue to be neglected in current formal referee

development curricula. One reason for this neglect is the paucity of specific evidence-based referee research upon which to frame a decision communication skills training programme. Consequently, current referees rely on a 'hidden curriculum' based on personal experience, such as communication skills learnt through occupational experiences prior to refereeing, or from the recommendations of colleagues and/or refereeing experts such as referee assessors or referee-coaches. This has proved problematic, with the result that referees receive substantial variability in the recommendations on how best to communicate a decision (see Anderson & Meyer, 1988; Lindlof, 1995). It is reasonable to expect referees operating at the elite level to have their own style of communication, one befitting both their individual personality and their professional experience and reputation as a referee. Hence, referee decision communication performance refers to the personal, unique, emergent and sometimes improvised side of decision communication.

The empirical thrust of this paper is, therefore, concerned with the referee decision communication practice that is the generic, routinised, socially monitored (Lindlof, 1995). In particular, the purpose is to identify and describe the core behavioural components and strategies that are thought by key 'stakeholders' within the respective practice communities to be essential for the fair and skilful communication of free kick and penalty decisions by elite association football and rugby union football referees. Importantly, too players and teams are recognised as 'clients' of refereeing decisions, and referee communication needs to be examined within the context of the interactive relationship between these groups (Dickson, 2000). The microanalytic approach provides the epistemological basis for such an investigation (Bull, 2002), and it is to this that the discussion now turns.

The Microanalytic Approach to the Study of Referee Decision Communication

Microanalysis represents a novel and distinctive way of thinking about communication (Bull, 2002). It is a method of enquiry that asserts the value of studying the fine details of social interaction through the detailed analysis of film, audiotape and videotape recordings. Of primary importance is a concern for the study of communication as it actually occurs within the natural setting. This study involved the observation and recording of referee decision communication episodes from match performances and relied heavily on the use of videotape for thorough and careful analysis. The merits of this approach to data collection have been recognised most recently by Duncan Mascarenhas, Dave Collins and Patrick Mortimer (2002) for the opportunity that is provided for *different* experts to consider independently a refereeing event that holds exactly the same information so that crucial comparisons can be made.

Importantly too, microanalysis recognises that all features of a given interaction are potentially significant, many of which can be taught and learnt

(Bull, 2002; Dickson, Hargie & Morrow, 1997). The interaction between a referee and match participants during a decision communication episode extends far beyond a mere verbal exchange. For instance, the tone and duration of a referee's whistle may have important referee decision communicative elements when used to denote a penalty or free kick decision. The underlying assumption is that all features of an interaction are potentially significant and should not be neglected or dismissed as unworthy of investigation (Bull, 2002).

Method

The data collection process involved the development of a research instrument specific to association and rugby union football. A videotape highlighting key decision-making episodes was prepared, and the extent to which each episode was skilful or unskilful was first evaluated by a sport specific panel of experts, and then analysed for the characteristics of each communication interaction. These data were then subjected to content analysis in order to establish generic features of skilful and unskilful communication behaviour.

Data were collected in two separate phases. In the first phase, six edited videotapes of episodes from elite referee match performances were prepared, three each for association football and rugby union football. Each tape highlighted every referee penalty/free kick decision communication episode from the particular match. A referee decision communication episode was deemed to have commenced from the moment the referee blew his whistle to indicate an offence had occurred, and ended upon the recommencement of play. This resulted in a total number of 178 referee decision communication episodes available for expert review and analysis, made up of 100 referee free kick communication instances from three association football matches and 78 penalty decision episodes from three rugby union football games. The mean number of clips per association football tape was 33 (range: 32-36), and 26 clips (range: 24-28) for each of the rugby union tapes. This distribution of clips was consistent with the mean number of penalties and free kicks per match for the 2001-2002 season for each code (Opta Index, 2003; Thomas, 2003).

For the association football sample, three referees on the national list gave their consent to be tracked throughout one of their matches using a digital video camera. The Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA), the world governing body, has regulations that prevent the within-match audio recording of referee comments. As a result, audio recording of the referees' comments during the match were not available. The focus of the association football referee analysis was, of necessity, on the non-verbal aspects of the decision interaction. In contrast, rugby union football referees officiating in international matches routinely wear an open microphone allowing their comments to be broadcast during normal television coverage. To overcome the limitation of the external match commentary masking the clear recording of the referee's comments, three national unions were contacted through their

respective referee development managers and requested to supply a 'clean' tape copy of their most recent international match. Three videotape recordings of international level rugby union referee performance broadcasting a clear and accurate audio and visual record were obtained.

The edited videotapes were distributed by post to six members of the two referee expert review panels (two former international referees, two ex-international coaches, one current elite referee and one elite referee-coach) who had been selected purposively for their depth of knowledge and experience of elite level refereeing practice of over twenty years. Panel members were asked to judge whether each referee decision communication episode was effective or ineffective, giving brief reasons for their choice. The second phase of the procedure required expert panel members to review their comments from the first phase and to select the five most effective and five most ineffective communication episodes. In doing so, they were asked to complete a detailed written assessment of referee performance on these ten episodes, including the specific referee decision situation depicted. Finally, panel members were asked to indicate in what ways, if any, the referee's decision communication for each episode could have been improved.

As a technical aside, obtaining an accurate and complete video and audio recording of elite referee decision communication practice proved a somewhat challenging endeavour. For though the reliability of television broadcast recordings was helpful, there were two important limitations. First, as this investigation required only the recording of episodes in which the referee communicated a penalty or free kick decision, it soon became evident that for one particular sporting code, the director of the TV coverage saw this as 'down time' and would thus use this natural break in play to show pertinent replays. Second, obtaining a clear audio recording of the referee's verbal communication, when awarding and explaining a decision, was hindered by the TV match commentary. These issues influenced the number of suitable episodes available for analysis, but the ability to use video footage provided a unique opportunity to study referee decision communication practice in greater detail and within the unique milieu in which elite referees operated.

The expert review forms were analysed using two different forms of inductive content analytical procedures: codifying and structuring. The initial analysis involved the classification of behaviours as skilful or unskilful practice, which was labelled according to the primary referee decision action being described. The data were coded according to the words and phrases from the texts of the expert review forms. For instance, if the text related to a description of the referee's action to blow the whistle, it would be classified under the label 'whistle' and all words or phrases used within the text to describe whistle behaviour would be recorded under this classification and categorised as either skilful or unskilful practice. Consistent with communication analysts who have used content analysis widely as a structured

means of studying and recording the fine details of interactional processes (Hargie & Tourish, 2000), the second stage of the analysis was to subject the data to a further examination using structural content analysis, involving the classification of patterns and/or sequences as skilled and unskilled referee decision communication practice.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 present the words and phrases used by expert panel members to denote skilful or unskilful referee decision communication practice. Seven primary referee decision behavioural actions were classified with associated behavioural descriptions.

Table 1. Referee skilful communication practice descriptors

Referee Decision Communication Practice: Primary Actions							
	1. Whistle	2. Gaze	3. Posture and Movement	4. Hand/ Arm Signals	5. Verbal Explanation	6. Control, Style and Composure	7. Time Management
Skilful Descriptors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Tone denotes offence type • Loud blast • Sharp blast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep offender in sight • Keep incident zone in view • Eye contact with offender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean / move towards incident zone • Look calm • Stand firm • Close proximity to incident • Strong stationary position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate direction & award of FK/P • Good / positive illustrate offence • Indicate offending player • 3-4 sec arm extension • Strong signal • Prompt indication • Clear / obvious • Crisp • Uncomplicated • Definite • Purposeful arm Extension • Obvious to players & Crowd • Positive signal conveying authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbally indicate offence • Explanation to team captain • Explanation to offending player • Verbal reason for decision • Explain what player/s need to do to avoid repeating offence • Communicate with all players involved • Concise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage & control the interpersonal space • Control timing of the explanation • Control timing • Control sequence • Isolate and/or identify offender • Good • Control restart (ball place) • Calm • Definite • Deliberate • Positive • Clear • Confident • Immediate • Non aggressive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take Time

Table 2: Referee unskilful communication practice descriptors

Referee Decision Communication Practice: Primary Actions							
	1. Whistle	2. Gaze	3. Posture and Movement	4. Hand / Arm Signals	5. Verbal Explanation	6. Control, Style and Composure	7. Time Management
Unskilful Descriptors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor • Delayed • Insufficient blasts to control players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor eye contact • Did not keep incident zone in full view • Not enough eye contact with offender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not move towards incident zone • No movement towards offender • No presence • Backed away from incident when making decision • Uncertain body movement (walking in, away & back) • Head down too much • Skipping action • Referee too detached from incident • Not purposeful / not definite • Referee rushes in (touches player) • Head down when signal- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too short in duration • No signal indicating offence • Messy two-handed signal • Weak • Unclear/confusing • Too peremptory • Poor • Too much gesticulation • Incorrect signal • Hurried presentation • Sloppy • No directional signal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No verbal explanation • No explanation to necessary players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed ball to be kicked away (placement of the ball) • Allowed players to crowd • Sloppy • Allowed players to control the situation • Offender not isolated • No appointment of blame to a player • Didn't have time to explain • Looks too casual • No presence • Appears not interested • Too calm • Loses composure • Confrontational • Wants last word • Touches player • Too relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take too long to get to incident zone • Don't react quick enough • Don't give yourself time to explain decision

Discussion

Referee Whistle Behaviour

With the exceptions of starting, restarting after half-time and ending each half, the laws that frame both association football and rugby union football require the referee to blow the whistle to indicate that a violation of the laws/rules has occurred and to communicate to match participants that play is to be halted

(FIFA, 2000; Morrison & Robinson, 1996). It is the primary referee action denoting the commencement of a decision communication episode. The majority of panel members indicated that a 'good' whistle was a basic requirement of skilful referee decision communication practice, but little further detail was provided. The former international referee and current association football referee manager did indicate, however, that the tone of the referee's whistle should denote whether the offence being penalised was a physical (impacting on player safety) or a technical one. This implies the use and consideration of the whistle as an extension of the normal non-verbal vocalisations of the referee. In other words, the referee's whistle becomes an important vocalisation mechanism by which a referee can express emotions and/or interpersonal attitudes to match participants beyond merely indicating that an offence has occurred.

This statement was the only clear attempt by expert panel members to define in greater detail the necessary components of skilful whistle practice. It suggests that referees need to be aware and have some understanding of how the duration, volume, quality and pitch of their whistle sound can express emotion and attitudes in a similar manner to spoken words. For example, the loudness of the whistle may emphasise a decision, the duration of the whistle may indicate the seriousness of the offence, and the quality may express the referee's own confidence level in the decision made. As the primary action, the whistle will be the first decision behaviour of the referee to be evaluated by match participants as they form an opinion of the referee's emotional and state of activation/arousal. As indicated by the current association football referee-coach, the frequency of the whistle blast can also be used as a means of controlling players when a decision is made.) Previous research confirms this view, and in an account of the elements of effective game control for referees reveals that whistle use is an important contributor to skilful referee decision communication practice (Baer, 1990).

Referee Gaze, Body Posture and Movement

The important roles gaze, body posture and movement are perceived to play within referee decision communication practice were also highlighted in the expert responses. Non-verbal communication research has long recognised the importance of gaze and body posture as essential elements for conveying a decision in a confident manner (Argyle, 1996; Brockner, Ackerman & Fairchild, 2001; Bull, 2002; Grumet, 1999; Segrin, 1999; Smeltzer, Waltman & Leonard, 1999; Wagner & Lee, 1999), and the willingness of the referee to immediately engage the offender using direct eye contact when awarding a decision was similarly recognised by Weinberg and Richardson (1990) as a key skill in the refereeing process.

Research into gaze aversion has consistently demonstrated an association with an increased anxiety state (Argyle, 1996). Expert panel members reported

that avoiding gaze with an offender on awarding a decision and backing away from the incident zone were elements of unskilful referee practice. Again this is unsurprising, especially as previous research has demonstrated that such actions are a mechanism of withdrawal and avoidance; an attempt by the referee to escape any explicit criticisms of the decision by match participants (Grumet, 1999). Competitors, in turn, may see this as representing a lack of personal conviction by the referee in the decision made.

The impact of negative non-verbal referee behaviour on players has also been widely investigated. Martens (1975) asserted that negative referee behaviour might in turn foster negative behaviour in players. Bar-Eli and his colleagues (1995) demonstrated that the likelihood of a match participant entering a psychological performance crisis state was related to negative refereeing behaviour. Past research has reported that in such a state, players are more likely to engage in serious rule violations, exhibit strong fluctuations in behaviour and show a marked decline in concentration and stamina (Bar-Eli, et al., 1995; Bar-Eli & Tenenbaum, 1989). Aggelos Kaissidis and Mark Anshel (1993) identified that a referee appearing to lack confidence in a decision was one of four circumstances in which players and coaches were most likely to argue with an official. It is also clear from past research that referee communication can influence player performance through an impact on player emotional states. Referees who maintain eye contact with the offender and move or lean in towards the infringement zone may project confidence in the decision, even if they are unsure of the decision itself, and by engaging in this skilful practice maintain control over the game.

Beyond a demonstration of confidence, a person's decision to make eye contact with an individual is one of the principal signals by which one denotes a willingness to begin an encounter (Grumet, 1999). The experts regarded the whistle as the primary means by which the referee could indicate to participants that an infringement had occurred, though they also reported that the ocular engagement by the referee with the offender was an immediate and skilful means of instigating a decision communication encounter. This, synchronised with the referee leaning or moving towards the offender and/or incident zone when blowing the whistle, emphasises further the referee's desire to engage the attention of the offender. It is this first step of interpersonal engagement, established through eye contact and body movement that facilitates the next two core skills identified by panel members for skilful referee decision communication practice, referee hand/signals and verbal accounts.

Referee Hand/Arm Signals and Verbal Accounts

The use of non-verbal signals by referees to illustrate an offence, and the action of the referee providing a verbal account explaining the reason for the decision, were seen as evidence for skilful referee decision communication practice. These results corroborate previous research, which suggests that officials must

communicate to the players that their connection between the incident and the rule is appropriate (Askins, Carter & Wood, 1981). This is an important tactic used by decision makers to avoid being held accountable for a decision (Folger & Cropanzo, 2001). Referees who provide causal accounts, explaining both verbally and non-verbally the connection between what they saw and the transgression observed, may be trying to provide a 'mitigating circumstance'. In essence, they are suggesting to players that they could not, or indeed should not, have acted in any other way. Non-verbal signals and verbal accounts assert to players that the referee cannot be held accountable for the decisions made, but rather it is the laws that govern each code and the makers of those laws who should be held responsible. The referee is merely enacting the laws as directed.

Anshel (1989) noted that referees who undertake such communication strategies were more likely to gain greater appreciation of their work from players as their decisions would be seen as more fair and just. Again, it may be inferred that a referee who is willing to provide both a non-verbal and verbal account for the decision is demonstrating to the players a high degree of confidence in the decision made. It has also been argued that when accompanied with a firm hand signal, the referee communicates a decision with conviction (Baer, 1990). The panel members may also have noted this when they used words such as 'strong' and 'definite' to indicate skilful arm signals.

Referee Control, Style, Composure and Time Management

The good practice guidelines as identified and discussed so far appear to have three aims: to project confidence in the decision, to engage the attention of the offending player/players, and to facilitate the perception of the decision as fair and just. The final primary referee actions for skilful referee decision communication (see Table 1) serve to advance this argument. Referee control, presentation style and time management within the decision communication episode are enhanced through the non-verbal behaviour of the referee. Isolating the offender, managing the interpersonal space and restart by controlling the placement of the ball, were all noted as elements of skilful practice by panel members. These behaviours conducted in a calm, definite and unhurried fashion were all noted as contributing to effective practice. They are well-documented behaviours associated with asserting confidence and authority (Argyle, 1996; Bull, 2002).

Between Expert Panel Comparison (Association Football v Rugby Union)

There are some important, and perhaps inevitable, distinctions between good practice in football and in rugby. The first indicates a clear difference in the responses to posture/body movement and verbal explanations. Code specific referee and competition variables may provide some explanation for this. Differences may reflect the different methods and patterns of movement referees use across the two codes. Rugby union referees are naturally closer to

the decision incident zone than association football referees due to the greater number of set piece game elements and thus Can rely more easily on verbal communication with players. The opposite is true for football referees who can be up to twenty yards away from an incident and have to rely, at least initially, on non-verbal communication techniques.

A demographic analysis of the two respective competitions from which experts received analysis tapes may also assist in understanding why the association football expert sample concentrated more on the non-verbal aspects of effective referee decision communication in their responses. The domestic competition in which the association football referee clips were chosen had a foreign player population base of sixty per cent, two thirds of whom it is estimated come from either a non-English speaking background or from a country where English was not considered a first language (BBC Press Release, 2002; Gleave, 2000). In such a culturally diverse environment, it is far from surprising that the association football expert panel reported a markedly greater number of non-verbal behavioural indicators for skilful referee decision communication than the rugby union expert panel.

Finally, the most obvious contribution to this difference between expert panel responses stems from the methodological limitations imposed by the non-access of the football sample to footage inclusive of referee verbal commentary. The evidence provided above helps to explain why expert panel members from association football tended to report and concentrate more on the non-verbal aspects of referee decision communication; and why, conversely, the expert rugby panel paid greater attention to the narrative and verbal style of skilful referee decision communication practice.

Concluding Comments

This paper has highlighted seven primary referee actions thought to denote skilful referee decision communication practice by a panel of expert referees. They are presented as an initial guide for elite referees as to what is considered good practice for referee decision communication performance. Three aims to referee decision communication practice emerged. These were first, to engage the offender/s attention and instigate a decision interaction episode; second, to project confidence in the decision made; and, finally, to promote the perception of the decision as fair and just. The good practice guidelines identified serve to assist referees in the training and development of the core skills deemed essential for skilful referee decision communication practice.

The guidelines identified and discussed are a preliminary insight into the behaviours thought to be good practice for skilful referee decision communication practice. They are a useful starting point but future work needs to be carried out in an attempt to clarify further and elaborate upon the specific behavioural components noted by expert panel members. Minimally though, the conceptual framework that has been developed in Tables 1 and 2 provides a

source of comparison through which existing referee practice may be evaluated. The expert panels for consideration of football and rugby do not, of course, represent all of the views from all of the stakeholder groups from each practice community; or at least there is no confirmation yet that they do. It is also necessary to investigate more fully the thoughts of current elite referees on good practice for referee decision communication. These insights would elucidate any subtle nuances involved with refereeing at the elite level that only current referees are in a position to report. Mascarenhas and his colleagues (2002, p. 329) concur: 'future studies on referee behaviour need to use referees, specifically those with sufficient practise and expertise at their craft, if useful data are to be accrued concerning subsequent enhancement of performance'.

On a methodological level, this study reinforces the usefulness and appropriateness of a microranalytic approach to the study of communication. Further advancement in video and digital editing technology will allow for even greater verbal and non-verbal details to be recorded and analysed. As such technologies continue to develop in sophistication, so too the understanding of human communication practice will continue to evolve. The challenge for social psychologists and communication scholars will be to develop communication skills training programmes that are able to keep pace, not only with the techniques and technology that will be associated with future communication practice and analysis, but also with the new knowledge that such technology will inevitably create.

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