

The New Black: Alternative Paradigms And Strategies For The 21st Century

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Periodization Paradigms in the 21st Century: Evidence-Led or Tradition-Driven?

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The planning and organization of athletic training have historically been much discussed and debated in the coaching and sports science literature. Various influential periodization theorists have devised, promoted, and substantiated particular training-planning models based on interpretation of the scientific evidence and individual beliefs and experiences. Superficially, these proposed planning models appear to differ substantially. However, at a deeper level, it can be suggested that such models share a deep-rooted cultural heritage underpinned by a common set of historically pervasive planning beliefs and assumptions. A concern with certain of these formative assumptions is that, although no longer scientifically justifiable, their shaping influence remains deeply embedded. In recent years substantial evidence has emerged demonstrating that training responses vary extensively, depending upon multiple underlying factors. Such findings challenge the appropriateness of applying generic methodologies, founded in overly simplistic rule-based decision making, to the planning problems posed by inherently complex biological systems. The purpose of this review is not to suggest a whole-scale rejection of periodization theories but to promote a refined awareness of their various strengths and weaknesses. Eminent periodization theorists—and their variously proposed periodization models—have contributed substantially to the evolution of training-planning practice. However, there is a logical line of reasoning suggesting an urgent need for periodization theories to be realigned with contemporary elite practice and modern scientific conceptual models. In concluding, it is recommended that increased emphasis be placed on the design and implementation of sensitive and responsive training systems that facilitate the guided emergence of customized context-specific training-planning solutions.

Keywords: emergent, biological complexity, athletic training, planning solutions

Periodization Theory: Origins and Legacy

Frederick Winslow Taylor is not a name often associated with athletic training planning. To recap some history: Taylor was the academically inclined factory supervisor who became the founding father of “scientific management,” the first application of scientific principles to the production industry. Taylor’s landmark 1911 publication *The Principles of Scientific Management* combined the scientific knowledge of the day, his pioneering time-and-motion studies, and management’s historical prejudice toward workers (“All we want of them is to obey the orders we give them”) to construct the first great planning paradigm of the modern era.

Taylor’s approach was typified by the belief that there was “one best way” to organize, manage, and plan production and that this “best” template could be uncov-

ered through observation and analysis. Industrialists of the day readily embraced the intuitively appealing logic of Taylor’s regimented paradigm. Henry Ford famously adapted Taylor’s methodology to the automobile industry. In sociopolitical contexts, Taylor’s influence was similarly widespread. Most notably his writings are cited as shaping the planning philosophies of Lenin, with many parallels between scientific management doctrine and later Soviet 5-year templates.²

This historical appeal can be attributed to a number of factors. First, when Taylor’s methodology was applied to machine-shop environments, productivity improved. Second, the rigorous dissection and empiricization of the production problem resonated with a society awakening to the explanatory power of the scientific method. Third, the reduction of the planning problem to a set of formulaic “rules” and automatized solutions satisfied the deep-seated human attraction to simplicity and explanatory closure, tempering our innate aversion to uncertainty and ambiguity.^{3,4}

The purpose of this diversion is solely to highlight that this historically pervasive ideology exerted a profound shaping influence on planning practice across

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