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The ActionTypes Approach (ATA),
an Insight into the Power of Human Preferences

The ATA is an innovative approach based on humility and respect. It was designed to reveal what allows each individual to express and realise oneself in the best possible conditions. It took us more than twenty five years to fine tune the approach thanks to our collaboration with athletes and business people of all levels and in various countries.

The study of human habits & preferences is a never ending story. If understood, it is a strong lever to achieve performance, dare we say in an ecological manner because the purpose is to avoid arming the person as well as his context while they interact with each other. The approach can be used in many fields: business, sports, coaching, teaching, etc. It is a powerful entry to the expression of the individual's potential. It also highlights the paradox of preferences. Our inclinations have two sides and include our profile as well as its counterpart, the opposite profile and both are natural. We can only learn and develop by revealing our strengths and accepting to let go when confronted with our weaknesses. The later will always benefit from the development of the former which is reversely not true! Accessing weaknesses directly is a very costly experience that will result in more frustrations and damages than gains on either side.

Let us take an example coming from football to illustrate what we just said. With the best intentions in the world, a coach is giving a young athlete an advice on how to kick a ball towards a target. The guy is applying himself with great care in order not to fall short of the coach expectations. If we analyse that more closely, on one side the coach based his sayings on knowledge coming directly from his experience and on the other side from what is commonly

Ronaldo : Vertical

accepted by the football community. The ATA is able to clearly demonstrate that his experience is in fact profoundly marked by his own ActionTypes, that is, his own preferences which could have made sense for him when he was still a player. The football community knowledge is strongly biased by what tradition (football culture and fashion) put into perspective at a given moment. We could ask ourselves what allowed these information to crystallise over time? The ATA dares to say that they mostly come from influences that have their roots anchored in the successful techniques developed by some former stars during the football history. Those solutions were perfectly suited for those people and therefore they spread along like memes (ideas that last and are transmitted from one generation to another). The ATA shows that if they can be used by some players they may not be relevant for all and even damaging to some. Of course football, like all other sport activities, has constraints intimately linked with the inner logic of the game (size of the field, speed of the ball, duels, roles, rules, etc.) But so does the player! He also has inner constraints derived from his neurological organisation, what we call his functional
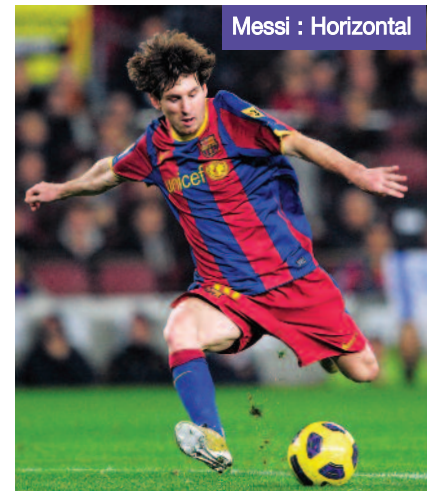

Messi : Horizontal

"neuronets" or his ActionTypes. They are individual and designed to allow him to coordinate his body movement in his context with lasting success (figure 1 illustrates that concept).

The emergence of a successful technique does not mean that it will suit everybody's need!

Let us come back to our football example. The coach is trying to teach the young talent to stay more vertical when kicking the ball and he has plenty of good reasons to support his demand. Moreover, as a model he is referring to Cristiano Ronaldo's way of approaching and hitting the ball. In fact, he is completely right because Cristiano's preferences allow him to keep a more vertical posture while kicking. We qualify those people as "Vertical". On one hand the young athlete couldn't but agree on that fact and on the other hand will he have the reflex to rejoin the coach that Lionel Messi is always doing exactly the opposite, that is, bending his body sideways while hitting? We qualify those people as "Horizontal". Depending on their character and education some do, some don't! It may be the start of a brilliant career if there is a match between the coach's and the player's

preferences but what if there is a mismatch? Regularly, in any sports, we observed talents getting seriously injured or finally resigning in front of such conflicts when they feel there are no opportunities for progress.
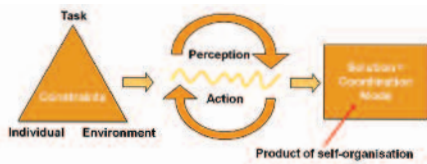

Figure 1 Three main sources of constraints trigger the perception-action cycle of human beings. If properly managed, their resolution will allow an emerging solution or coordination mode. There are no passivenesses in this highly active process! Modified from Newell and McDonald 1994 in "Les coordinations perceptivo-motrices" from Jean-Jacques Temprado and Gilles Montagne, Armand Colin 2001.

What we pointed out in our example is directly linked with a technical problem or motor skill constraints. We also want to stress that in case of discrepancies between the outside demands and the inside needs, serious problems may as well appear in physical conditioning and affect management.

Differences are innate, acquired or simply lived. The interactions between the three determine the quality of our motor patterns as well as the cognitive quality of our decisions. For the ATA, innate preferences forms "neuronets" that could be seen as privileged neural paths that characterize each individual. Those paths have a proper dynamic moving from one extreme (our natural profile) to another (its opposite profile). The image of a lemniscate (laying eight) is useful to describe such a path.

Figure 2 A lemniscate (laying eight) is a good metaphor to describe how the dynamic of a preference is working. The cross designed on the left states for the position of the natural profile from which an economical expression easily

takes place while maintaining relaxation and control. The cross on the right gives the position of its counterpart (the opposite profile) where learning is made possible but depends on the individual's attitude. Performance is still available but he may encounter difficulties and tensions if he does not let go (no control possible).
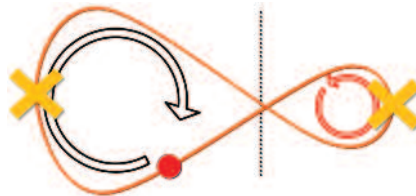

The red dot is the actual position of the person. In that case, he is moving towards his natural profile position. This means that at that very moment everything seems fine and easy to face.

What we witnessed over time is the fact that in order to reach a higher level in any field of expression, it is necessary to integrate the power of one's "right" side (small loop). Even if that side could

potentially destabilise us and create stressful situations, the final result is completely dependent on how we are prepared to accept what we will face, dare we say who we will face: ourself. For the ATA, self-knowledge is a must in order to perform at the highest possible level! Without that understanding it is hardly possible to fully reach our own potential. It is also why we associate the motto "move to your next level" with the ATA. The situation corresponding to our next level will always generate stress and regularly push our self onto the small loop. The solution is to be able to come back with what has to be learned at that moment without being trapped inside. A proper coaching using the ATA will integrate situations that create such momentum and demonstrate that it is possible to perform despite of the seemingly lack of control. With such an ecological dynamic, we state that it is achievable to avoid some pitfalls that could have led to injuries and even to abandon (to give up).

Positioning the ActionTypes Approach - ATA
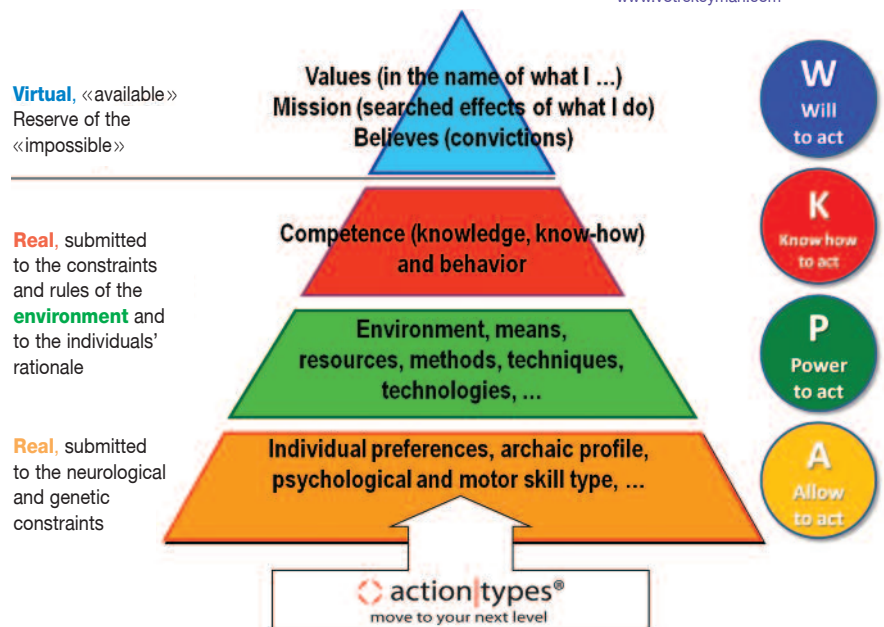
Figure 3 The logical level corresponding to the ATA is underlying all others. Allowing to act according to one's own preferences is a must if one wants to launch the full potential of a person.
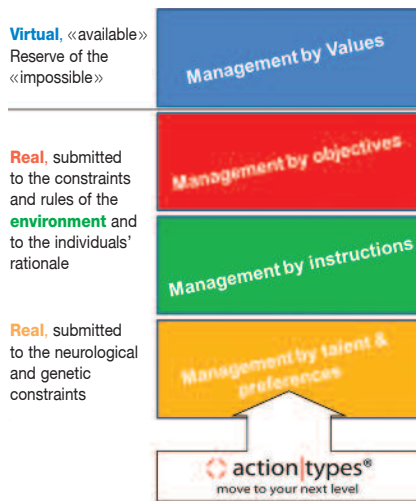
Figure 4 ActionTypes' mission is to optimize the individual's talent in the action. There is a need to look for economy and efficiency at all levels if one wants to last without collateral damages.

Each sport's gesture can be perceived as a problem to solve. The specific coordination required is conditioned by the context and the individual's natural needs (ActionTypes profile). One size fits all concepts limit the quality of motor expression. The ATA is based on 25 years of research, experimentation, courses and practical applications in various contexts. Nature took a long time to develop our motor patterns. Therefore, respect, understanding and humility are required qualities when dealing with individuals' preferences.

The various dimensions composing an ActionTypes profile

Every living being is subject to the effect of gravity which influences the bone structures and the muscle chains coordination. ActionTypes has highlighted four main motor patterns:

- **G** like Global motor skills

- **D** like Distal or fine motor skills

- **R** like Rhythm motor skills

- **C** like Conceptual motor skills

Gs need to globally engage the body (accent on the big muscles of trunk and legs): they have a better control of action realized close to the body and without rotation. Gs need to face the incoming action using translational, symmetric and linear movements.

Ds need to engage fine motor skills (accent on forearms, wrists and fingers, same with the legs): they have a better control of actions executed away from the body (foot, eye) that needs higher eye hand/foot coordination. Ds also use translational, symmetric and linear movements.

Rs are sensible to rhythm (time sequence in space): their organisation is asymmetrical; they mix very well the global motor skills on their right side with the fine motor skills on their left side. Rs need to use rotational movements.

C needs a concept to construct the movement (accent on mental representation of the activity and or the situation): their organisation is asymmetrical; they systematically engage their right side in the action. Cs need to face the incoming action to sharpen their perception and use rotational movements.

Key features of each motor skills' family

	Walking from the	Vision	Movement	Posture
G	Bottom, while producing energy	Low frequencies, unfocused, towards the ground	Linear, from the hips	Symmetrical, turning around middle of the body
D	Bottom, while producing energy	High frequencies, focused, towards the ground	Linear, from the hips	Symmetrical, turning around middle of the body
R	Top, while restituting energy	Low frequencies, unfocused, towards the sky	Rotatory, from the shoulders	Asymmetrical, turning around left side
C	Top, while restituting energy	High frequencies, focused, towards the sky	Rotatory, from the shoulders	Asymmetrical, turning around right side

The ActionTypes Approach developed and uses physical tests to obtain a reliable assessment of the natural motor patterns. We postulate that without a reliable diagnostic based on physical evidence it is difficult to get the true dynamic of an individuals' preferences (see Figure 1). Because the person is moving back and forth between its profile and its counterpart, any cognitive assessment will fail revealing somebody's true dynamic.

There are two main coordination patterns which are the foundation for most movement in order to organize the body against gravity. People maintain their balance either from the bottom (upwards) or from the top (downwards).
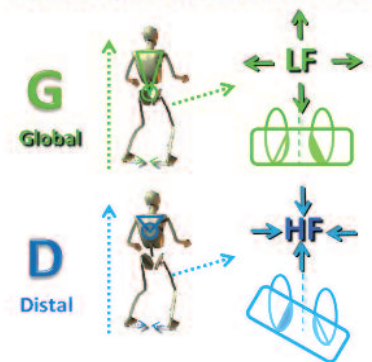
Characteristics of the walking patterns

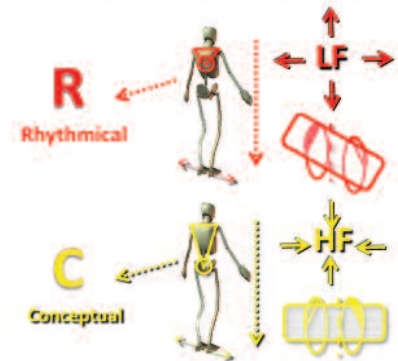|	Walk from the Bottom - WB	Walk from the Top - WT
Information comes from	Senses / Sensations / Touch	Intuition / Anticipation
Information leads to	Fact / Action / Repetition / Routine	Forecast, mental representation / Combinations
Adaptation while moving	Down-up = Organize the lower body first	Up-down = Organize the upper body first
What allows the action	Front muscle chains (hip flexors)	Back muscle chains (hamstrings)
Accent on	Pronation (« to take »)	Supination (« to give »)
Posture organization	Centre of gravity behind, symmetry	Centre of gravity in front, asymmetry
Movement dominance	Linear	Rotatory
Seek to	Impact and measure their actions	Gain Self-Confidence / Create Interrelations

Characteristics of the visual preferences

	Low frequency - LF	High frequency - HF
Information comes from	Movement perception	Perception of contrasts
Information leads to a decision based on	Personal values	Impersonal principles
Adaptation while moving	If able not to focus with their gaze	If able to focus with their gaze
What allows the action	Extension of the spine	Flexion of the spine
Accent on	Breathing out	Breathing in
Posture organization	Aim with their body	Aim with their vision
Movement depends on	Personal implication in the duel	Tactic and strategy
Seek to	Feel the context	Understand the context

Figure 5 *Characteristics of the four motor skills' family. Walking from the bottom (Gs and Ds have their weight more on their heels): upward organisation (adduction) while moving forward. Walking from the top (Rs and Cs have their weight more on their toes): downward organisation (abduction) while moving backward. LF: low frequency vision (no focus) for Gs and Rs. HF: high frequency vision (focus) for Ds and Cs. Gs and Cs use a more frontal organisation (feet parallel). Ds and Rs use a more diagonal organisation (staggered stance).*

Even if we could not go through all the elements that characterize each motor skill family, we hope we could awake your curiosity and add new perspective to your own observation skills.

"People succeed best when they have others who understand their talents, challenges, and abilities (…) Great teachers have always understood that that real role is not to teach subjects but to teach students. Mentoring and coaching is the vital pulse of a living system of education."
Sir Ken Robinson (in The Element, 2010)