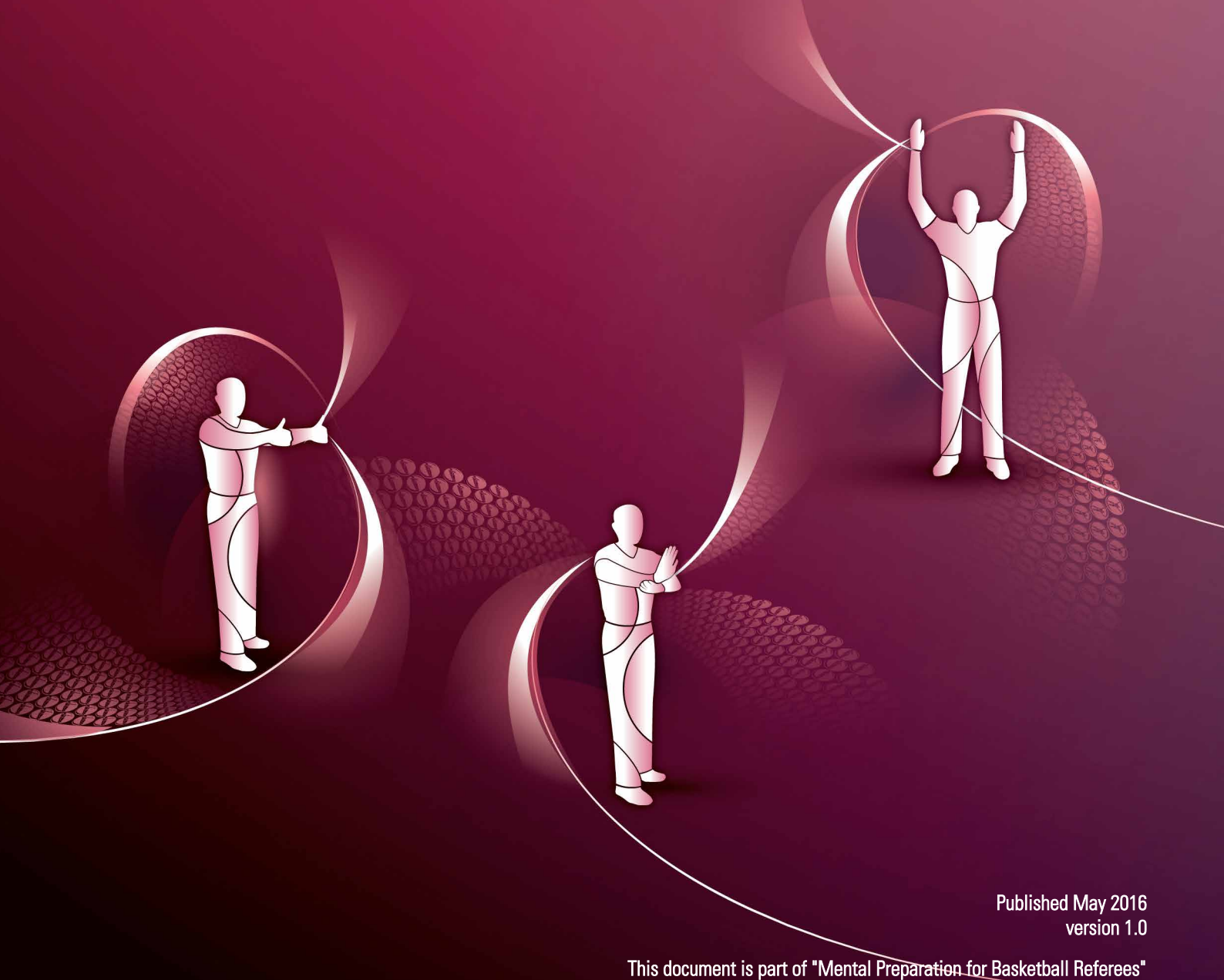




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IMPROVE YOUR... MENTAL TRAINING - CONCENTRATION AND ATTENTION



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CHAPTER 2: CONCENTRATION AND ATTENTION

Concentration in sport performance is usually called the executive psychological skill because on some degree controls all others. During the game your nervous system through all senses detects millions of information from various sources, so it is very important that you filter information that is relevant and vital in order for your performance to be successful.

Table 2. Relevant or helpful and distracting or harmful information

RELEVANT INFORMATION		
EXTERNAL related to information outside yourself that is relevant to your performance : sights, sounds, smells, touch, and other sensory feedback information (basket, ball, court, players, time table, 24" time, lines, co-officials, crowd, etc.)	INTERNAL related to any information that you can focus on inside yourself relevant to your optimal level of performance: affirmative thoughts, positive self-talk, emotions, physiological activity, optimal heart rate, breathing rhythm, and kinesthetic feedback.	PERFORMANCE RELATED profession and sport specific informations: rules, codes, norms, etc.
DISTRACTING INFORMATION		
INTERFERING Internal or external cues that hinder performance directly: negative thoughts and self-talk, thinking about past mistakes, thinking about possible future mistakes, increased heart rate, tiredness, fatigue, noise, co-officials mistakes, inappropriate behavior of coaches, players, fans, etc.	IRRELEVANT cues not relevant for exact situation and your performance but can take your mind away from an effective focus: work, private life issues, social plans for that evening, flight schedule, etc.	

According to Attentional Style Theory (Nideffer, 1976; 1990; 2001) focus of attention shifts along two dimensions: a dimension of **WIDTH (broad to narrow)** and a dimension of **DIRECTION (internal or external)** which results in four different attentional styles (Figure 2).

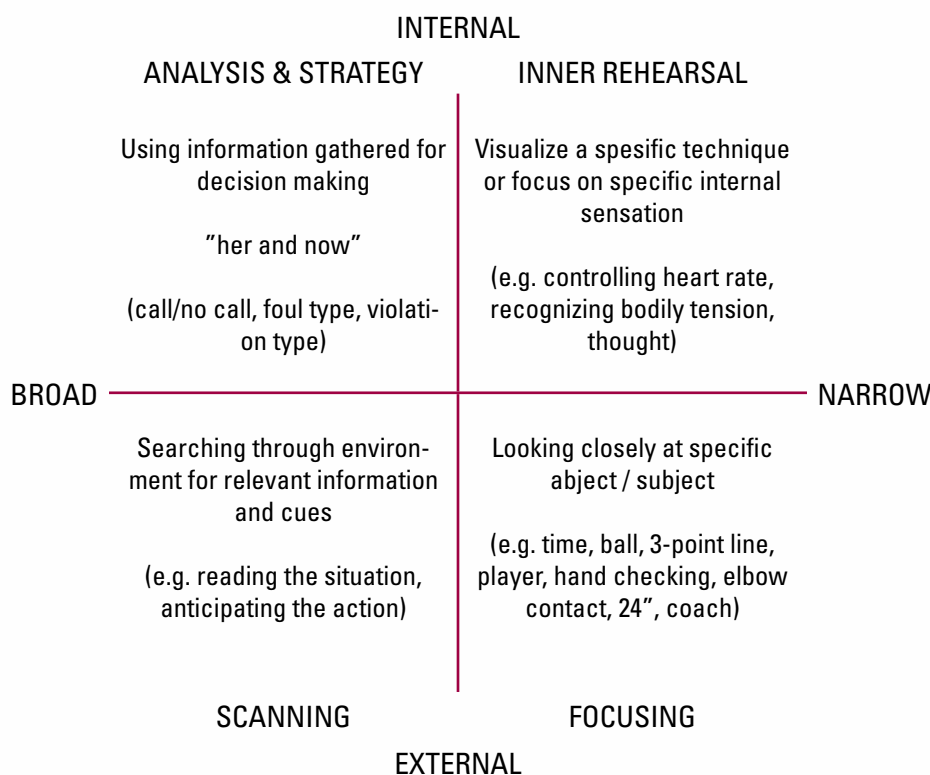


Figure 2. Four attentional styles

During the game while you are officiating, **many shifting is required**, from external-broad (i.e. scanning the whole situation in your AoR) to *external-narrow* (i.e. hand checking or elbow contact) and *broad-internal* (decision making – call/no call). Because high level officiating requires a good reaction time and decision making, it is really important that you do not “stay” or “stuck” into one attentional style too long!

TRY TO SHIFT YOUR ATTENTION QUICKLY AND ACCORDINGLY TO SITUATIONAL DEMANDS!

EXAMPLE 2.1: When you start to think about your previous mistake (self-doubt and negative thought) arousal increases, shifting breaks down, and attention begins to narrow involuntarily and becomes more internal. You can stay too long in your internal focus and lose a chance to see and recognize the important information that is before and around you during the action that is going on “here and now” (external-broad and external-narrow). If this happens it is important that you shift your attention as soon as possible to broad-external (to see the “big picture”) and search for information outside the court when action is actually going on. This shifting usually happens in a few seconds, sometimes in a second or two, depending on the situation’s characteristics and demands. Using some **key words** and **affirmative self-talk** can help you to **speed up the shifting** from a “stuck” area to other required cues and areas of attention. The more your skills are over-learned, the more you are prepared and experienced and you will be able to shift your attention and be better in performance.

CONCENTRATION EXERCISES

EXERCISE 2.1: GRID WITH NUMBERS AND SIGNALS

Your task in this exercise is to connect (with a line) all numbers, by order, beginning from number 1 to number 2, then from number 2 to number 3, from number 3 to number 4, and so on, until you connecting number 49 to number 50.

You can start with 2 minutes and see how many numbers you can connect during that time.

After the 2 minutes have expired, your task is to search for the signal (Ø) and count how many signals are there.

5	12	34	Ø		29	1	16	50
47		48	8	23		Ø	42	
	33		41		3	28	15	32
		21		35			Ø	49
11	40		14	Ø	18	10	26	43
		Ø		17		Ø	6	
24		20				44	7	36
	Ø	38		2	37	31		25
39	4		45	Ø	27		19	
Ø	22	46	13			9	Ø	30

This type of exercise can help you learn to focus your attention and scan the whole picture for relevant cues. You can modify this exercise with higher numbers or a different sign, even letters. Also, when your concentration improves, you can add different types of distractors such loud music or TV. Also, you can reduce the time required to connect the numbers from 2 minutes to 1:45 min.

EXERCISE 2.2 : EXPLORING ATTENTIONAL STYLES

Search for video clips from any game you prefer. Then choose one scene and freeze it. Sit comfortably and let your exploration begin:

1. Study the scene closely and scan the whole situation. Observe the position of the referees according to their AoR. Look at how the players are standing and try to anticipate what will happen next.
2. Now, select a specific object or subject – i.e. 24" clock and see how many seconds is left for this action.
3. Now, shift your attention to your heart rate, and try to control your breathing rhythm in a few seconds. Search for the specific sensation while doing it – i.e. air flow during the inhalation.

4. Now, again, scan the whole situation and by anticipating the next move in this scene make a decision in a way as how you would you do (movement or decision) if you were one of the referees.
5. After you made a decision, press play and see what actually happens in the next action.

This type of exercise helps you to experience different attentional styles by shifting your focus through external – internal – broad – narrow dimensions. You can use different scenes and in each of them you can choose different information or cue to focus on.

EXERCISE 2.3: FIND THE DIFFERENCE

This exercise refers to looking for the differences between the seemingly the same pictures. Some differences are more visible and clear than others, and your task is to find as many differences as you can within a given period of time.

With this type of exercise you improve your attention shifting and also your patience.

You can find this kind of exercise online for free and practice on your smartphone or computer.

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