



*Cultural architects': A  
qualitative analysis of  
elite coaches' perceptions  
of highly influential  
soccer players*

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# *Karakteristika ved høyt presterende grupper*

Tett fysisk kontakt

Masse øyekontakt

Fysisk berøring  
(håndhilsener,  
klemmer)

Korte energiske  
utvekslinger

Alle snakker med alle

Få avbrytelser

Mange spørsmål

Intens, aktiv lytting

Små,  
oppmerksomhetsfulle  
handlinger ("tak",  
åpning av dører osv)

Humor, latter



# Content of culture

Artefacts are observable by people outside an organization, include: Buildings, facilities, logos, photos on the wall, stories, anecdotes, rituals, ways of communicating, and language.

Espoused values are values and beliefs that are articulated by leaders, but it is also important to consider values that are expressed and shared between members of an organization.

Basic underlying assumptions indicate the core or essence of the organization's culture. These assumptions are often presumed without thinking, and individuals typically are unable to explicitly articulate them.

# *Leadership - Flat structure*

Performance-facilitating values emerge organically from within the group, rather than as a result of a top-down initiative from management, this is conducive to a high performing culture (Potrac & Jones, 2009; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012).

The quality of relationships is likely the result of your ability to:

- 1) treat your athletes or peers as unique and valued individuals - learn about them, show that you see them for who they are;
- 2) invest your time and energy in your athletes or peers - be totally present in every exchange you have with them; and
- 3) be future oriented with them - signal that the relationship will continue



# *En misforståelse*

- ◊ Gode prestasjonskulturer er ikke nødvendigvis lykkelige der det alltid er god stemming. Dette er stort sett ikke tilfelle.
- ◊ Kulturene består av energiske og høymotiverte individer. De er derfor mindre fokuserte på trivsel enn på å løse vanskelige problemer sammen.
- ◊ Oppriktig feedback, ukomfortable sannhetsbudskap, hvor gapet mellom hvor gruppen er og hvor den burde være konfronteres.

(Coyle, 2018, s. 56)



# Punktlighet

- ◆ Pep Guardiola, the coach of the highly successful FC Barcelona football team in 2008-2012, said this about what it meant to be in this team: "There are some things that show us what a team is. Today, we had planned to meet at 5. At 4.30, everyone was here. The players know that when we stop doing this, everyone can beat us." (Guardiola, 2012).
- ◆ The Norwegian alpine skiing team has a saying related to this: "On time is 5 minutes early!" This means that when they say departure to the slopes is at 10, what is meant is not that you have to be there at 10, you have to be there 5 minutes before 10.
- ◆ It seems that these teams have created a culture where its members are intrinsically drawn to each other and their mutual activity, and this is likely a positive force for both individual and collective performance development.







## Work etich

"Attacking Vikings": The start foundation of the performance culture in the Norwegian alpine skiing team was primarily related to increased training- volume and quality.

Similarly, another internationally high performing group of Norwegian athletes - the Ingebrigtsen brothers - (track and field athletes in middle- and long-distance running) never compromise implementing planned practice (Tjelta 2019).





Rune Giske 2021

## *Collective orientation and performance monitoring*

In his autobiography former Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, presents a short narrative about David Beckham's retirement from the club.

The triggering event was a match where United lost and Beckham neglected to track back (he merely jogged) before the second Arsenal goal, and then, he was dismissive of the manager's criticism. Ferguson's accusation was that Beckham let his team down. Beckham's behaviour is with other words not in consistency with the performance expectation, and it was a violation of a fundamental norm. Adding to that is that the pop culture icon, over a period of time, had left the impression that his own interest was more important than the interests of Manchester United.

Performance monitoring is a fundamental characteristic of effective teams and it provides information which in the next step can give energy or force players with low performances to improve (Salas et al., 2005).

According to Ferguson, Beckham was given the opportunity to improve but was unwilling to adapt.



# Formelle og uformelle roller

- ❖ Formal roles are those that have been directly established and prescribed by the team, club or sport itself including leadership roles such as the coach or captain, or playing position roles (e.g., goalkeeper, central-defender, midfielders, playmaker or attacking midfielder).
- ❖ Informal roles are those that evolve as a result of the interactions among team members and are not formally prescribed by the group or organization (Mabry & Barnes, 1980).

*List of informal roles*

Name	Definition	Total <sup>a</sup>	Per team
Comedian	An athlete who entertains others through the use of comical situations, humorous dialogue, and practical jokes. This individual can also be referred to as a jokester, clown, or prankster.	24 (8.4%)	1.50
Spark plug	An athlete who ignites, inspires, or animates a group toward a common goal. May be referred to as the task booster.	17 (5.9%)	1.06
Enforcer	An athlete who is physically intimidating or willingly belligerent and who is counted on to retaliate when rough tactics are used by the opposing team.	15 (5.2%)	0.94
Mentor	An athlete who acts as a trusted counselor or teacher for another athlete on the team. This athlete has usually been with the team for a few years and has experience and wisdom to teach the less experienced athlete(s).	21 (7.3%)	1.31
Informal leader – non verbal	An athlete who leads the team by example, hard work, and dedication.	15 (5.2%)	0.94
Informal leader – verbal	An athlete who leads the team both on and off the playing surface through verbal commands. This individual is not selected by the team as a leader but assumes the role through social interactions.	15 (5.2%)	0.94
Team player	An athlete who gives exceptional effort and can be seen as a workhorse that is willing to sacrifice and put the team before his/her own well-being.	16 (5.6%)	1.00
Star player	An athlete who is distinguished or celebrated because of their personality, performance, and/or showmanship.	21 (7.3%)	1.31
Social convener	An athlete who is involved in the planning and organization of social gatherings for a team to increase group harmony and integration.	20 (7.0%)	1.25
Cancer	An athlete who expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team.	3 (1.1%)	0.19
Distracter	An athlete who draws away or diverts the attention of other teammates decreasing their focus.	4 (1.4%)	0.25
Malingerer	An athlete who prolongs psychological or physical symptoms of injury for some type of external gain (e.g., sympathy, attention, access to athletic therapy).	3 (1.1%)	0.19

*Note.* This table was adapted from “Informal roles in sport teams,” by C. J. Cope, M. A. Eys, M. R. Beauchamp, R. J. Schinke, and G. Bosselut, 2011, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 9(1), 19-30. Reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com>).

# *Social impact theory*

- ◆ In Latané's (1981) social impact theory it is suggested that the greater the number of sources of social impact in a social situation, the greater the impact will be. The impact increases when higher status individuals are the source, when the action is more immediate, and when there are a greater number of sources



# *Cultural architects*

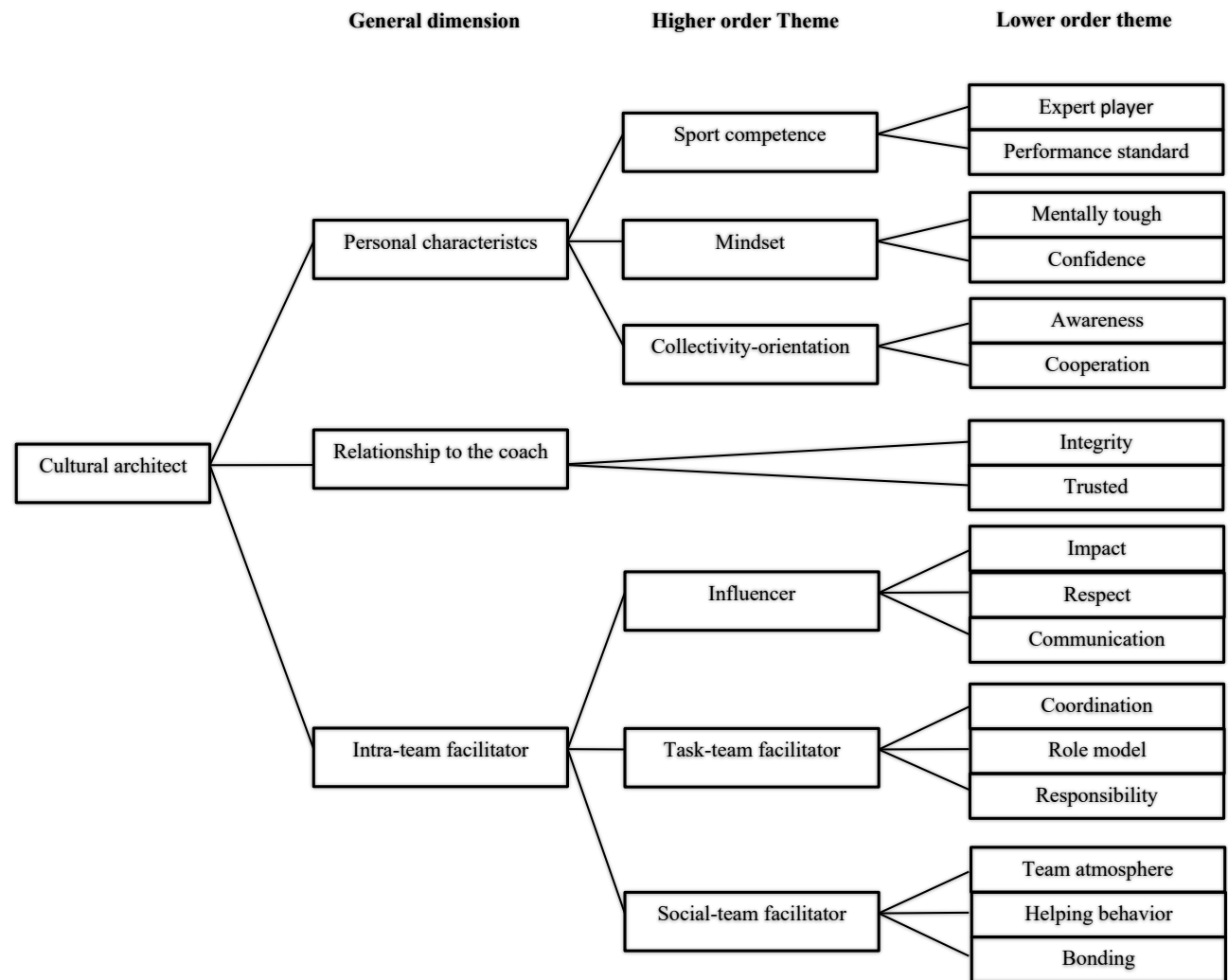
- ◆ High status players are often considered as highly significant change agents in the team and whilst such influential players may occupy a formal role such as the captain, or vice-captain, they have also been identified as being 'informal leaders', acting as 'cultural architects' within the team (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016).
- ◆ The term 'cultural architects' in the sport context originates from the former English national soccer coach Svein-Göran Eriksson and the appointed sport psychologist Willi Railo

# Research Question

- ◆ Cultural architect are players with the potential to strengthen and develop the team, and the attitude and ability to change the mind-set of their teammates, and the potential to enhance the culture in the team
- ◆ How do elite soccer coaches perceive and utilise highly influential players in their teams?



# Kulturell arkitekt



## Sport competence:

- ◆ *They must be soccer-related obvious first choice at the place they play. There must never be any doubt about the player to start, or suddenly sitting on the bench. Player must have the soccer professional qualities.*
- ◆ All coaches agreed that the athletes need to be highly skilled and one of the best players on the team



# Mindset

- ◆ The player must have a winning instinct. So, when the team wears a bit, it is the one who has to grab, because it has to go ahead. In relation to work, fight and stand on.
- ◆ The coaches describe the players as mentally tough and with a winning mentality. They appear with confidence and low self-doubt. They were unique players in the way they cope with personal set-backs or periods of deficient performance and how they positively encouraged and influenced the whole squad.

# *Collective-orientation:*

- ◆ A basic collective attitude and understanding emerged as crucial.
- ◆ The player takes responsibility for the team collective and focuses on the group dynamics. The player must have social antennas ... The player must be able to see and understand what is happening, and it must be sensitive to this information



*Relationship to the coach*  
***Integrity and Trust.***

I need someone that challenge me. ... s/he is such a player challenge me and the team and make decisions and have integrity (Lower Order: Integrity, Participant 10)

You know who you can lean on, you know in a way that you have one player who is your prolonged arm into the team. (Lower Order: Trust; Participant 9)

# *Intra-team facilitator*

## *Influencer, team-task facilitator, social-team facilitator*

*Influencer:* They have a natural power to influence the team through a natural leadership competence.

- She had the locker room, and I knew if we won or lost so was she right person to be the leader in the locker room.

*Task-team facilitator:* They had a coordination function in the team. They are highly involved in task related functions in the team and promote effort to achieve the team goals

- So then in the heat of the match, the player can go out on the pitch and give a clear message of how things should be, making it easier for the players to play their game. One who are in the heat of the battle and organize the play. The player just did the job together with them, creating culture just by doing



# *Intra-team facilitator*

- ◇ *Social-team facilitator:* All coaches claimed that these players also have some social related functions, like helping behaviour, contributing to a positive team atmosphere and bonding the team together.
- ◇ The player was so very social, always the one who in some way pulled up the mood in the group anyway. Player felt it was its job to do it and did it automatically.

# Four Practical Points



Potential indicators that can help identify cultural architects or developing players to become cultural architects.



Knowledge about cultural architects can be useful for coaches in order to strengthen their own leadership impact by utilizing cultural architect's



Players aspiring to occupy a cultural architect's role in a team, the knowledge about cultural architects can be used as a framework for their own development process.



Focusing on, searching for, and/or developing cultural architects may create a team awareness which can clarify the strengths and weaknesses in the team culture, and extrapolate the uniqueness of the team.

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