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# Team Culture as a Function of Team Success

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*Sport has gained significant importance globally, acting as a refuge for individuals to express themselves freely. A strong "sporting culture" within teams is crucial for their success, as it defines their identity and promotes teamwork towards common goals. The primary aim of this study was to explore the best sport coaching styles and establish a desired team culture by synthesizing existing literature to gather and synthesize the existing body of knowledge related to coaching styles and team culture in sports. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other academic sources published in the last two decades to ensure the inclusion of contemporary research findings. The following data were systematically extracted: (1) coaching styles: specific coaching approaches or behaviors discussed (e.g., autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, etc..); (2) team culture: key themes related to team dynamics, shared values, communication patterns, and group cohesion; (3) outcomes measured: metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the coaching style (e.g., athlete performance, team cohesion, psychological outcomes, satisfaction); (4) findings: summary of results and recommendations for coaching and team culture development. This article concludes by synthesizing themes from the literature into recommendations and suggestions for team coaches and team leaders to establish and maintain a positive team culture to enhance the likelihood of team success.*

**Keywords:** *Sport success; coaching; leadership; sport performance; sport psychology*

## Introduction

Sport, over the past decades, has become increasingly influential for people around the world. As the popularity of sports grows, interest in them becomes more detailed. Fans have come to be concerned about not only what is seen superficially but also what is happening behind the games, such as personal interests, coaches, stories about players, game styles, and strategies (Kang-Won 2021). A 'sporting culture' is considered one of the most prominent contributors to the success of an organization (Cole & Martin 2018). A team or organization will not be as effective without a strong culture as it could be with one.

A positive sporting culture refers to an environment within sports that promotes respect, inclusivity, integrity, teamwork, fair play, and enjoyment, while discouraging negative behaviors such as cheating, violence, and discrimination (Australian Sports Commission n.d.). This type of culture focuses on the well-being of athletes, encourages personal and collective growth, and fosters a sense of community and mutual respect among participants, coaches, and fans. In a positive sporting culture, success is defined not only by victories but by the development of character and relationships.

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Key aspects of a positive sporting culture include (see Australian Sports Commission, n.d.) (a) respect for others - encouraging mutual respect among teammates, opponents, coaches, and fans, creating an environment of understanding and tolerance; (b) fair play - prioritizing honest competition, where winning is not achieved by breaking rules or manipulating outcomes; (c) inclusivity - ensuring that sports are accessible to people of all backgrounds, abilities, and genders, promoting diversity and equal opportunities; (d) health and well-being - focusing on the mental and physical well-being of athletes, encouraging balanced lifestyles and stress management, and discouraging overtraining or harmful practices; (e) leadership and mentorship - coaches and senior players are expected to lead by example, guiding younger or less experienced athletes, and fostering a growth mindset. The ultimate purpose and outcome goal of a positive sporting culture is to foster consistent winning and peak athlete performance from the positive sporting culture ingredients.

A team's culture is about the conduct and behavior of everyone involved in the organization, it is working together towards shared objectives and, as such, is an immediately identifiable part of the group's identity (Hughes 2018). A team culture will also need influential personnel that will step up and become architectural leaders for the rest of the team members as well as the coaches and fans to recognize as someone fully embodying the team's culture throughout their everyday life.

Reflecting the team culture the most are team captains. Captains are trusted, respected, encourage teamwork, suitable role models, have a high sense of belonging to the team, competitive, unyielding, and courageous (Gökduman et al. 2023). For the culture and the players to function and be successful, a good, strong-minded coach respected by all is important. Players and staff alike would probably not perform up to their full potential if they do not trust their coaches and teammates. Trust is the basis of all human relationships and can be said to be the most fundamental power to continue the relationship. In addition, trust is accepted as an attitude toward the formation and maintenance of human relationships (Lee et al. 2023).

Bearing in mind the importance of team culture on athlete and team success, the purpose of this paper is to inform athletes along with current and prospective coaches on what an effective team culture is, how to build an effective and long-lasting team culture, the type of personnel required in order to carry out the team culture, and how to enforce the team culture into action in order to achieve success on the field as well as off it.

## Method

The primary objective of this systematic literature review was to synthesize existing knowledge on sport coaching styles and their influence on the development of a successful team culture. This section details the research design, systematic search strategy, data extraction protocol, and thematic analysis approach employed to address the study's aim.

## Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence pertaining to coaching styles and team culture in sports. This methodological choice was predicated on its rigorous and transparent approach to knowledge synthesis, enabling the identification of key trends, theoretical underpinnings, and best practices within the field (Moher et al. 2009; Petticrew & Roberts 2006). The review specifically focused on peer-reviewed academic literature to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, evidence-based research.

## Search Strategy and Study Selection

A comprehensive and replicable search strategy was implemented across multiple electronic databases to maximize the identification of relevant studies. The following academic databases were systematically searched: PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of psychological, sport science, education, and broader scientific literature.

The search was conducted using a combination of carefully selected keywords and phrases, including: "sport coaching styles," "effective coaching in sports," "team culture in sports," "coach-athlete relationships," "leadership in sports," and "team dynamics." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were utilized to combine these terms effectively.

To augment the database search, reference lists of key articles identified during the initial search were manually scanned for additional relevant studies that might not have been captured.

Studies were systematically screened for inclusion based on the following pre-defined criteria:

- Empirical research focusing on the relationship between coaching styles and team culture in any team sport.
- Publication date between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2023, to ensure the inclusion of contemporary research findings.
- Language of publication restricted to English.
- Publication type limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and academic books.
- Content relevance providing direct insights into the interplay between coaching style, team culture, and team performance outcomes.

Studies were systematically excluded if they met any of the following criteria:

- Did not focus on team-based sports or coaching within a team context.
- Were not peer-reviewed (e.g., conference abstracts, opinion pieces, editorials).
- Focused primarily on individual sports or aspects of sport performance unrelated to coaching or team dynamics.

Following the systematic application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 104 articles were selected for full-text review and thematic analysis.

**Data Extraction Protocol**

For each of the included articles, relevant data were systematically extracted using a standardized protocol to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness. The extracted data categories included:

- Coaching Styles: Specific coaching approaches or behaviors examined (e.g., autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire).
- Team Culture: Key themes related to team dynamics, shared values, communication patterns, and group cohesion as described in the study.
- Outcomes Measured: Metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the coaching style or the characteristics of the team culture (e.g., athlete performance, team cohesion, psychological well-being, athlete satisfaction).
- Key Findings and Recommendations: A concise summary of the study's main results and any explicit recommendations for coaching practice or team culture development.

**Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis**

A thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the extracted data. This iterative process involved several distinct stages:

All 104 selected articles were thoroughly read and re-read to achieve an immersive understanding of their content, key arguments, and findings related to coaching styles and team culture.

The extracted data were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and ideas. This involved assigning descriptive labels to segments of text that captured specific coaching behaviors, their perceived impacts, and their connections to team culture outcomes.

**Theme Development**

Initial codes were then collated and grouped into broader, overarching themes. These emergent themes were organized under two primary categories reflecting the study's aim: (a) Effective Coaching Styles and (b) Team Culture Development. Each primary category contained sub-themes delineating specific coaching approaches and cultural practices consistently identified as beneficial.

### Reviewing and Refining Themes

The developed themes were critically reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the data and captured the essence of the findings. This involved checking for internal homogeneity (coherence within themes) and external heterogeneity (clear distinctions between themes).

### Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was precisely defined and given a clear, concise name that encapsulated its meaning and scope. Illustrative examples from the extracted data were used to support the themes.

### Integration and Synthesis of Findings

The final stage involved synthesizing the identified themes to construct a coherent and overarching narrative regarding best practices for sport coaching styles and the establishment of a desired team culture. This synthesis aimed to highlight areas of consensus, identify any notable discrepancies or contradictions in the literature, and pinpoint extant gaps requiring future research.

### Ethical Considerations

As this study constitutes a systematic literature review and did not involve direct interaction with human participants or the collection of primary data, ethical concerns related to participant consent, privacy, and confidentiality were not applicable (Petticrew & Roberts 2006). However, meticulous care was taken to ensure that all included studies adhered to established ethical guidelines in their original research. Furthermore, rigorous academic integrity was maintained throughout the review process, with all sources being properly cited in accordance with APA guidelines.

## Thematic Analysis

### Culture

Culture is a very important quality that all sports teams should incorporate into their philosophies (Pennington 2017; 2019). A culture requires strong values that the majority of the team agree on and are capable of carrying out every day; if this fails, then the culture will not work as efficiently and successes that may be desired will be much harder to achieve (Godbout 2023). Success often has absolutely nothing to do with good luck but typically has much to do with a good culture (Hughes 2018). A conscious understanding of culture can better ensure that its influence is strong

and positive (Cole & Martin 2018). Knowing that a good culture will be strong and positive, being able to identify a team's culture and who shows it and embraces it the most is important (Pennington et al. 2018; Strand & Slater 2023). Identification and culture are thought to be valuable notions that can reveal the behavior of individuals in the sports organizations or clubs to which they belong, along with their sense of belonging, their feelings, their commitment and whether they feel valued (Çevik & Onag 2023).

Identified by Campbell (2021), there are three main pillars that can identify what a winning culture is founded upon. The first pillar is *personal growth*. Using techniques like individual development planning, each team member is able to look at their existing career and map out where they want to go and how they may want to get there (Campbell 2021). The second pillar is *diversity and inclusion*. A team that focuses on diversity and inclusion will not only provide alternative perspectives and ideas but will also provide opportunities that might not otherwise be available (Campbell 2021). The third pillar is *connect, collaborate, and having fun*. This pillar emphasizes activities that ensure everybody is well informed, in good contact, and can openly share in a safe environment (Campbell 2021).

When a person part of a team feels they are trusted and backed by the entire team, they will perform much better and closer to their full potential. This applies to the coaches as well, knowing they have their full support from their players will give them more confidence when coaching and mentoring the players, allowing for better understanding between players and coaches. Communicating what the end goal is and making sure everybody is on board and pulling in the same direction is the foundation of a winning culture (Campbell 2021).

## Styles of Culture

There are many different styles of cultures a team may pursue, but the decision may depend on many factors. It may depend on the type of players on the team and how they behave amongst themselves, how the head coach wants to run the program themselves, or the number of resources the team has to be successful. Once the ability to establish culture is achieved, it is important to understand what values should comprise that culture (Cole & Martin 2018). Recent research has identified numerous styles of cultures, however, there are five main cultural styles that have been found in numerous business settings that have been translated for many amateur and professional sports teams that have been implemented as their day-to-day philosophies. These cultural models are listed and described in the following sections.

## The Star Model

A star model is when a team gets the best player in the league and wishes it will create success on its own. It has been observed that executives have hired from elite universities or other successful companies and gave employees huge amounts of autonomy (Hughes 2018). This translates to sports as occasionally some teams will simply "invest" in the best players and coaches that are available by offering contracts that there competitors just simply might not be able to. Not only do they attempt to get the best personnel, but they will also acquire and maintain the best facilities possible using economic resources far beyond their competition. This model can have been seen to achieve success very well by big sports clubs, for example, like Real Madrid Football Club and the New England Patriots American Football Team, but this model has been shown how it can equally bring tremendous failure. If one piece falls out of place or does not work as well as it once did, the whole team can come crashing down. This was seen when Cristiano Ronaldo won four Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League titles and then left Real Madrid in 2018. This was also observed when Tom Brady won six Super Bowls and then left the New England Patriots in 2020. Both of these teams have endured very rough hardships and now have had to spend years trying to rebuild the success they once had in the aftermath of radical change.

## Autocracy and Bureaucracy Models

The autocracy and bureaucracy models are fairly similar in structure and how they are run; the only difference between them is who is running it at the very top of the chain of command. In the bureaucratic model, cultures emerged through thick ranks of middle managers (Hughes 2018). There will be a small group of equal people at the top that form a common ground on decisions that they will make together that will impact the club. This model has most famously been used by Liverpool Football Club, who uses a six-man committee to influence who the team can transfer in and out of the club and decides their next coaches to take over the team. An autocratic structure is similar, except that all the rules, job descriptions and organizational charts ultimately point to desires and goals of one person (Hughes 2018).

An autocratic culture suggests one influential person at the top has an impact on everything around them. An autocracy has shown previously success is very possible, but it can become dangerous when it becomes about just one person. Sir Alex Ferguson was a Scottish manager who was the manager for Manchester United Football Club for 26 years and saw the most success by any manager in the history of soccer, winning 38 major trophies and most notably winning 13 Premier League Titles. However, when Sir Alex retired in 2013, Manchester United did not know the next steps to move forward out of Sir Alex Ferguson's shadow, having been nowhere near the level they were at when he was in charge (Hughes 2018).

## The Engineering Model

An engineering model describes how a team or organization who have similar personnel who are somewhat average programs that over a period of time, gradually build themselves up over time, and becomes better through very technical expertise in specific areas (Hughes 2018). When everyone comes from a similar background and mindset, one can rely on social norms to keep everyone on the same path (Hughes 2018). Success in this culture may take longer than others, but signs of success can be seen at times throughout the process. This has been the case for teams like Arsenal Football Club when they hired Mikel Arteta in 2019. When Arteta came in, Arsenal was in a bad spot with very average players. Arteta used his technical expertise to build up the players and the club over a span of almost three mediocre seasons to a team that is now a consistent title contender. A unique scenario contains Athletic Bilbao, a soccer team in Spain, is similar to what an engineering model represents. Bilbao's transfer policy for bringing in players is that they will only sign a player if they are from one specific region in Spain. Simply put, the club only signs players who were born or raised in the Basque Country, a region of Spain that has a distinct language and culture (Grant 2023).

This approach means that every single player that has played at the club since the 1930s has some connection to the club and its heritage. The policy is not just a marketing gimmick or a temporary strategy – it is a deeply ingrained philosophy that has shaped the identity of the club for 80 years (Grant 2023). While this approach does have obvious downsides to it [such as…?], seeing how the club will not be interested in signing any other player around the world unless they are from that region, it has shown very good success. The talent pool in the Basque Country is relatively small compared to other parts of Spain, which means that Athletic Bilbao cannot compete with the likes of Barcelona or Real Madrid in terms of star power or transfer fees, however, apart from giants like Real Madrid and Barcelona, Athletic are the only team that can boast the feat of never being relegated from La Liga, the number one league in Spain (Grant 2023).

## The Commitment Model

The commitment culture in sports leadership refers to the creation and maintenance of an environment within a sports team or organization where individuals (athletes, coaches, and staff) are deeply engaged and dedicated to the collective goals, values, and success of the team. In this culture, the commitment goes beyond mere participation or compliance; it is characterized by a strong sense of personal responsibility, passion, and unwavering support for the team's objectives and vision. An example of a commitment culture in sports leadership can be found in teams like the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team. The leadership within the team emphasizes "sacrifice" and "selflessness" for the good of the group. This culture encourages players to put in their best efforts consistently, even when faced with personal challenges or setbacks. The leaders within the team ensure that each

player understands their role and the importance of their commitment to the team's legacy and success.

The commitment culture has been known to be the most difficult type of culture to establish, but it has been found that once it has been established with the right personnel carrying it out, the success that follows it is tremendous (Hughes 2018). Hands down, a commitment culture outperformed every other type of management style in almost every meaningful way (Hughes 2018). In a business setting, it was found that the companies that installed a commitment culture were 22% more profitable and employees found that a pay raise of 33% was not required in order for them to stay as they found the business to be so good for them that they did not need it (Hughes 2018). One of the main reasons why commitment cultures were successful, it seemed, was because of the sense of trust that emerged among workers, managers, and customers, which enticed everyone to work harder and stick together through the setbacks inevitable in any industry (Hughes 2018).

Commitment cultures are driven by a clear sense of purpose and behaviors that become the rules of the membership to become a part of that organization by putting equal people at the organization's center. The most notable usage of a commitment culture is Football Club Barcelona. After performing in a very below average manner, the club decided change was necessary, and brought in Pep Guardiola. Guardiola and Barcelona immediately installed a system that required 100% determination, effort and hard work from every player for the good of the team, not individually. This culture also does not just go through the team, it must go through the entire club in order for it to work. Breadth occurs when the culture is present in all of an organization's functional areas from top to bottom (Cole & Martin 2018). The success Barcelona Football Club achieved after the installment of the commitment culture and the hiring of Pep Guardiola was staggering. Barcelona won eight out of the next 10 La Liga's, three UEFA Champions Leagues, and Barcelona's success cycle was 2.5x longer than the average success cycle in the world of football, lasting roughly 10 years (Hughes 2018).

A potential limitation or weakness of the commitment culture in sports leadership is the risk of burnout and overtraining among athletes. In a commitment-driven environment, where there is a strong emphasis on dedication, discipline, and sacrifice for the team's success, athletes may feel pressured to consistently push beyond their limits. This can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including burnout and unrealistic expectations. While the commitment culture can foster high performance and cohesion, coaches and team leaders need to recognize these potential downsides. It is important for leadership to balance commitment with adequate support systems, opportunities for rest and recovery, and attention to the holistic well-being of athletes to prevent these negative outcomes.

## Formal and Informal Leaders

Athlete leadership has been defined as "an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal" (Newman et al. 2019). Formal leaders are typically coaches or

captains who have official authority granted by the team structure or organization. They make strategic decisions, give instructions, and enforce rules. Whereas informal leaders do not have an official title but hold influence over their teammates due to their experience, personality, or relationships. Their authority is derived from trust, respect, or social dynamics within the team.

As formal leaders, team captains are asked to fulfill predefined tasks, while informal leaders are expected to take on external responsibilities such as the social environment, which is formed as a result of human relations and interactions (Gökduman et al. 2023). A team captain is someone that can be chosen by the team, the coach, or both to represent the team as a strong and influential person. A team captain is considered to be a transactional leader. Transactional leadership has been described as an exchange of requests or needs to be satisfied between the leader and the followers (Kang-Won 2021). This kind of leader works to clarify the roles and task requirements of followers, recognizes the needs and desires of subordinates and make it clear that if they work to fulfil their job requirements, then those needs and desires will be met (Kang-Won 2021). Team captains act as a source of peer leadership within the team, often displaying social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision-making behaviors (Newman et al. 2019). By effectively developing team captains as formal leaders, they are equipped to provide leadership in sport and are more likely to transfer leadership skills to other domains of their lives (Newman et al. 2019).

Even though studies have found that both forms of shared leaderships are very beneficial for group and team dynamics, a formal leader position can become a good platform for athletes to develop even more, as well as continue to practice their leadership skills and behaviors (Newman et al. 2019). An informal athlete leader is one who emerges as a leader within the group as a result of their behavior and interactions with team members but does not necessarily assume a position such as team captain (Lower-Hoppe et al. 2020). People that could qualify as informal leaders would be asked to fulfill duties as task and social leaders. Task leaders solve problems, make decisions, and also make referrals for team goals, while social leaders build trust by providing psychosocial support to the team (Gökduman et al. 2023). A leader on a team does not necessarily have to be a team captain, they can just be someone that the whole team can trust and respect and who will hold one another accountable. However, some leaders, whether they be formal or informal, may not be born natural leaders. They may need someone, like a coach or mentor, to help develop them into good leaders.

Formal and informal leaders may sometimes experience conflict due to differences in their roles, influence, and approaches to leadership. Conflicts between formal and informal leaders in sports teams typically arise from differences in authority, leadership style, decision-making, and the role each leader plays within the team's dynamics. Formal leaders may feel undermined if informal leaders influence the team without following official directives. On the other hand, informal leaders might resist formal leaders' authority if they believe their influence and contributions are not acknowledged or respected. This conflict could manifest in disagreements about team strategy, training methods, or player roles.

An additional potential conflict could arise if a formal leader's directive approach may clash with the informal leader's more democratic or player-focused style. Further, if/when team loyalty is split between formal and informal leaders harming overall team unity, thus team trust, communication, and chemistry. It is crucial for formal leaders to recognize and value the influence of informal leaders, while informal leaders must respect the formal leadership structure. Communication, mutual respect, and alignment of goals can help resolve potential conflicts and ensure that both types of leadership complement each other for the benefit of the team.

## Coaching Leadership

A head coach and coaching staff will always have a huge impact on players' performance on the field and off. It is vital for coaches to express their wishes across to their team, so it is crystal clear on what they expect and hold as the standards. The learning process, success, motivation and achievements in sports influences leadership style, because a positive relationship with the coach provides motivation and desire for success (Capric et al. 2023). While the players are the ones actually playing in the games, it is up to the coaches to set up the team as best as possible by creating good tactics and selecting the right players to carry out those tactics to give the team the best chance to succeed. Coaching staffs experience significant pressure in their roles due to the multifactorial nature of team's performances including match outcomes and competition ranking during the season (Gómez et al. 2021). Coaches and owners are people in a sports club that can be considered transformational leaders. Transformational leaders communicate a clear vision of the potential and priority of an organization. The vision helps followers see what an organization can accomplish, helps followers understand their purpose in the organization, and helps guide followers' actions and decisions (Kang-Won 2021).

## Player-Coach Relationship

The overall quality of coach–athlete relationships has been shown to positively associate with the coach's leadership effectiveness on athletes' outcomes (Zhao & Jowett 2023). Trust between coaches and players is the basis of all interactions, and performance varies depending on the level of trust in coaches (Harmon et al 2019). The influence a coach has on the athletes they train is synonymous with the direction in which the athlete's life in the sports world will evolve, stagnate, or disappear (Nicolae et al. 2023). A strong relationship with good communication between a player and their coaches drastically improves both the athlete and the coach's development, skills, and chances of success with each other. The degree of relationship with the coach perceived by the athlete directly or indirectly affects the individual's motivation, emotion, and behavior as well as the exercise-related perception (Lee et al. 2023). A coach should be capable of motivating their players for action, in which case, it will get the players energized and ready, giving a better chance of success. Besides motivation, all the mental processes and psyche of the athlete are involved

in the sports activity, and the coach has the role of supporting and potentiating their qualities, as well as diminishing and inhibiting the defects as much as possible (Nicolae et al. 2023).

## Coaching Changes

At the elite level, the assessment of a coach's ability in sport is mainly based on win-loss records within national and international competitions with poor success leading to a coaching change at any stage of the season (Gómez et al. 2021). A coaching change in sport is an extreme, but frequently occurring phenomenon (Gómez et al. 2021). The process of changing coaches has many steps that have to be met in order to bring someone new in and depending on the severity of the situation at a club, the process of finding a new man for the job can either take a few days, weeks, or even months. Many sports teams will not even wait until the end of the season to make a coaching change. If a team is normally very good and they start to have a bad season, the club might decide to part ways with that coach in order to bring someone in to prevent the situation from getting worse during the season. A 'manager boost' is when a team will bring in a new coach and that coach will immediately start to produce positive results for the team. At the end of the season, these results produced during that manager boost may be the difference between either relegation from a league or a much-needed financial boost for the club.

An example of this manager boost method was seen recently with the 2022 Philadelphia Phillies Major League Baseball team. In the midst of the 2022 season, the Phillies fired their manager, Joe Girardi, standing at an underwhelming 22-29 record to start the season. The Phillies then, on the same day of firing Girardi, hired Rob Thomson as interim manager (Skiver 2022). An essential part of Thomson's managerial style was giving players opportunities to overcome slumps and mistakes (Skiver 2022). With this management and trust in his players, Thomson led the Phillies to an improved 87-75 record, securing the last playoff wildcard spot and making it all the way to the World Series in the process (Skiver 2022).

There have been several theories proposed that could substantiate the effects of a possible coaching change. The common-sense theory proposed that a coaching change would disrupt the current negative trend with improvements in subsequent performances via invigorated players and fan base (Gómez et al. 2021). The vicious-circle theory proposed that a coaching change would affect the internal club/team relationships and improve subsequent declining performance (Gómez et al. 2021). The ritual scapegoat theory proposed that firing a coach would decrease stakeholders' frustration with the team's poor performance and subsequent performances perceived to be better (Gómez et al. 2021).

## Discussion

It has been suggested the true qualities for a sports team of any level of competitiveness if success is desired within that program. A team must require a strong and fully supported culture style that the whole team can agree on and be willing to express every day in their lives both on and off the field of play. Also, developing leaders and captains massively increases the chances of team success as captains command respect, accountability, and hard work from their teammates and coaches, and represent these qualities to lead by example. Finally, a successful coach is someone who is respected by their players and surrounding staff members. They are people that are able to establish and maintain a good player-coach relationship and become someone that people can go to with any concerns about the team or possibly something in their personal life that they may need advice for.

The authors call for athletes and coaches to use the aforementioned suggestions to build new and productive cultures that hold strong values and standards for everyone in the program to be successful on and off the field. They should build players to become team leaders and captains that are strong, respected, and hold everyone - including themselves - accountable, without being self-absorbed. Coaches should have communication skills and effectively use those skills with their players and be capable of acting in bad situations and resolving them in a manner that is mature and respectful. These topics warrant further study and discussion. Of particular interest would be an exploration of individual and team sport differences regarding coaching styles and philosophies. Further, a comparison between men and women's sports, with a coach of the opposite gender would yield value to the coaching community.

The following sections outline recommendations on methods and techniques on how to select the right team culture, to develop as a coach, and also how to develop team leaders.

## Creating the Right Culture

Some may regard the coaching staff as purely responsible for the type of culture needed to influence their team and for the team to execute, but that is not always the case (Cole & Martin 2018). A player-driven program gives the athletes on the team the opportunity to run the culture and have the coach just be able to hold the players accountable to what they want to have as the team standards. For sports teams at the professional, amateur, and collegiate levels, a strong and clear vision of a culture might be a better advantage when attempting to attract new recruits and staff. It is recommended for the team and the players to get together and to identify and develop a team 'why' statement, trademark behaviors, and keystone habits that will represent the values of the culture. Have the team ask themselves one question for each of the aspects, to which they can contribute multiple answers. First, ask, "why do I play this sport?" This question is for the why statement. Next, ask, "who are you/what describes you when you are at your best?" This question will be for the trademark behaviors. Finally, ask, "what do you do when you are at your best?"

This question will be for the keystone habits. Once these questions have been answered by the entirety of the team, have each member of the team select off of the list of answers for each question which ones they may agree to the most. This will dwindle the number of responses until each question has few answers on which everybody agrees are the most important and become the standards of what the team now holds. This will allow everyone to be a leader for this new culture since it is something that they can all agree on for the most part. Cultural norms define how an organization will define leadership and leaders create and manage culture (Kang-Won 2021).

## Developing Team Leaders

The proper development of team leaders will not happen overnight; it will take time. Therefore, it is recommended that players and coaches' study some of the great team captains in sports history - current and retired - and understand what they do for the team and why they do it (Newman et al. 2019). In addition, coaches should ask the players who they believe are the most qualified to hold the team accountable to the coach's standards. This will allow the coaches and prospective team leaders to gain trust and confidence in their abilities. Then, influential players begin to gain the respect and attention of teammates, making them a team leader.

## Developing Coaching Skills

Leadership coaching is promising for leadership development and its practice and has become a widely used intervention for leadership development (Ladegard & Gjerde 2014). Therefore, it is recommended prospective coaches undergo leadership training and professional development (Ladegard & Gjerde 2014). Some teams may have many individuals from similar places and backgrounds, but some may not, and coaches must be prepared for those times. It is important to understand that a diverse and inclusive team means a coaches' staff may not share in those same motivations or be driven by the same things; and that is actually a good thing (Campbell 2021). In this case, prospective coaches should use their resources and enquire other coaches about how they have dealt with complicated situations in the past and be able to build on those situations into their own practices.

## Concluding Recommendations

The pursuit of a successful team culture in sport coaching necessitates a nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics beyond traditional hierarchical models. While the presence of designated formal leaders (e.g., coaches, team captains) remains crucial for structural clarity and strategic direction, this article posits that cultivating leadership qualities across all team members significantly contributes to a more robust and resilient team culture. This perspective aligns with contemporary

theories emphasizing distributed leadership and collective responsibility within organizational settings (Gronn 2002; Spillane 2006).

Encouraging leadership attributes in every player offers several demonstrable benefits for team cohesion and performance. Firstly, the diffusion of responsibility, as opposed to its concentration in a few individuals, enhances decision-making agility and collective accountability (Cohen & Bailey 1997). When leadership is shared, teams can maintain functionality and adapt to unforeseen challenges even in the absence of formal leaders. Secondly, the exhibition of leadership qualities—such as proactivity, peer motivation, accountability, and constructive feedback—fosters stronger interpersonal relationships among teammates. This shared commitment cultivates a profound sense of unity and collective purpose, where each individual perceives their contribution as vital to the team's overarching success (Yukl 2012). This concept is supported by research indicating that shared leadership positively correlates with team effectiveness and satisfaction in sports contexts (Loughead et al. 2016). Thirdly, empowering athletes through the cultivation of leadership skills significantly boosts individual confidence and intrinsic motivation, particularly in high-pressure situations requiring initiative and resilience (Ryan & Deci 2017). Finally, this approach facilitates comprehensive leadership development, preparing athletes to assume leadership roles in various contexts, both within and beyond the sporting arena. The diversity of leadership styles that naturally emerges from such an environment—ranging from vocal leadership to leading by example or providing emotional support—can effectively address the multifaceted needs of a dynamic team (Northouse 2018).

However, it is equally important to acknowledge potential challenges associated with a blanket expectation of formal leadership from every player. The primary concern lies in the potential for overlapping roles and subsequent confusion, which can disrupt established team structures and decision-making processes. A clear understanding of formal leadership roles (coach, captain) is essential to prevent ambiguity and internal conflict (Chelladurai 2007). Furthermore, not all individuals are inherently inclined or comfortable assuming overt leadership responsibilities. Forcing such roles upon players who prefer supportive or follower positions can lead to discomfort, resentment, and ultimately hinder individual and team performance (Avolio et al. 2009). The critical balance between individual leadership contributions and primary team responsibilities must also be maintained to prevent neglect of core roles in favor of leadership aspirations. Finally, an overemphasis on individual leadership without clear guidance can precipitate power struggles and interpersonal tension, thereby undermining team cohesion rather than enhancing it (Carron et al. 2002).

In conclusion, while it is neither necessary nor always beneficial for every player to assume a formal leadership position, fostering intrinsic leadership qualities—such as accountability, responsibility, and peer support—across the entire team is highly advantageous for developing a successful and resilient team culture. This approach, grounded in principles of distributed leadership, should complement individual strengths and contribute to a positive, collaborative environment. Crucially, this distributed leadership must operate within a framework of clear role distinctions and under the guidance of formal leaders (coaches, captains) to prevent

fragmentation or conflict. The most effective strategy involves allowing leadership to emerge organically while providing structured support and clear expectations, thereby ensuring the seamless functioning and sustained success of the team (Burton & Raedeke 2008).

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