

An Analysis of the Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns of a Collegiate Men's Varsity Soccer Team

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The Institute's focus on research attempts to identify the relationship between motivational and attitudinal patterns and the performance of individuals, teams, and organizations. Although these patterns are part of the make-up of the individual, collectively, they may reflect an organization's or team's culture that, in turn, influences members' thoughts and actions. The question is to what extent these patterns, individually or collectively, contribute to successful performance.

The motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) of student-athletes on a varsity men's soccer team at a Division I University were analyzed in order to understand better their team culture based on their motivational and attitudinal patterns and the relationship between this culture and performance.

This intercollegiate sports team was established at the university in the 1950s and has won numerous national championships. The current head coach has been with the team for over 5 years, although there have been other changes in the coaching staff that time. This team is traditionally ranked in the top 25 nationally and competes for conference titles year after year.

Methodology

The University and coaching staff agreed to do the analysis during the 2007-08 academic year. In the spring, the coaching staff completed the assessment tool called the *Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation*. The coaches received feedback on their individual results as well as a team profile of the coaching staff. Then, they were shown the Performance Model that frames the relationship between MAPs, Criteria, and Competencies (as well as emotions) and individual outcomes. A serendipitous outcome of these sessions was the coaching staff's awareness of their similarities and difference and how they could use this information to work together and to coach more effectively.

During the pre-season practice period (fall), the players were oriented in a team meeting to the project by the coach and lead researcher. At that time, paper-and-pencil copies of the Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation (iWAM) were distributed and players completed the assessment.¹ The Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation or iWAM is a technology for identifying certain thinking and language patterns that relate to corresponding behavior patterns. The thinking patterns can be recognized by evaluating language structure. This technology has been in use in the USA and Europe in a variety of business applications since 1981. The iWAM is organized into 48 scales clustered in 15 categories.²

The iWAM scores became part of the overall database into which the measures described below were loaded.

¹ The Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation (iWAM) is an online assessment tool that is also available in hard copy. In this study, the coaching staff recommended the paper-and-pencil version in order to get everyone through the test at the same time. The iWAM system provides a manual entry of data option which was used in this case.

² For more information about the iWAM survey, see www.iwaminstitute.com or www.jobeq.com.

Player Performance Ratings

The Player Performance Rating (PPR) is a measure of how well the player performs. The PPRs for the Saint Louis University Men's Varsity Soccer Team were created by the coaching staff. The coaches used a rating system based on a scale of 0-100 scale with '100' being the best players in the world (i.e. Pele) to create the Player Performance Rating. The coaching staff assumed that the best college players at this point in time would rate '80' compared to the best in the world. The coaching staff based their performance ratings on how well the player performed in game and practice situations regardless of their talent ability. When comparing *high performers* (>50) to *low performers* (≤50) several significant patterns ($p < .05$) emerged.³

- High performers did not wait to respond or reflect on their response (*lower Reflection and Patience*).
- High performers were less concerned with past performance (*lower Past time orientation*).
- High performers are more interested in obtaining information (*higher Information interest*).
- High performers are less concerned with obtaining several examples before they will be convinced (*lower Number of Examples; that is, they reach the point of decision quicker*).

Performance Gap Ratings

The second dependent variable is called "Performance Gap Rating" (GPR). The Performance Gap Ratings (PGR) is a rating of the extent to which a player performs at their level of capability. The PGR is created from ratings by the coaching staff in which they rated a player's talent (Talent Rating). The Performance Gap Rating (PGR) was calculated by subtracting a player's Talent Rating from their Player Performance Rating. It is assumed that the lower the gap, the better; that is, the extent to which a player performs at or near their level of talent, the better contribution they will make to the team performance.

The outcome of the PGR calculation for this sports team ranged from -20 to +10. When comparing Small Performance Gap (≥ -3), Medium Performance Gap (< -3 to > -14), and Large Performance Gap players (< -14), several significant patterns ($p < .05$) emerged.

- Small performance gap (SPG) players must see something in order to be convinced (*higher convinced by seeing*).
- SPG players do not require doing or practicing something in order to be convinced (*lower convinced by doing*).
- SPG players do not require a lot of activity and perhaps focus on the quality of their actions as opposed to the quantity (*lower focus on activity*).
- SPG players rely less on the actual content of communication and perhaps more on the non-verbal content of the communication (*lower neutral communication*).

³ Since this is a first study of its kind, all three player groups were included (high, middle, low) to see if and where differences appeared. The actual focus, however, is the identification of what separates the best performers from those judged to be the lowest performers.

Comparing Coaches and Players

A unique advantage of the Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation is that comparisons between leaders' and subordinates' (coaches and players, in this case) patterns can also be done in order to make suggestions for future communication. Communication between coaches and players is important because the language is directly related to a player's motivation and matching language to patterns can reduce the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. This unique feature of MAPs can also be utilized with a sports team to compare the head coach or head coaching staff with the team as a whole or a particular group of players that may be underperforming. The latter second approach was utilized in this particular study, as the MAPs of the coaching staff were compared with the Large Performance Gap (LPG) players. This is the group of players that are underperforming when comparing their talent rating with their performance output. From these comparisons several significant differences ($p < .05$) emerged.

- Coaching staff believes taking personal responsibility is very important compared to the LPG players (*higher Sole Responsibility*).
- Coaching staff wants to understand and/or develop a concept completely before action (*higher Concept work approach; that is, an emphasis on thinking before doing*).
- Coaching staff has a higher desire to obtain facts and knowledge about their opponents and sport in general (*higher Information interest filter*).

How MAPs Relate to a Successful Sports Team

- ✓ Successful players on this particular sports team are required to act quickly to have the ability to understand and execute quickly through instruction from coaches. **MAPs such as *low Reflecting and Patience, high Convinced by Seeing, low Convinced by Doing, and low Number of Examples* will motivate players to act quickly and to understand coaching through seeing just one example, without being constrained by having to do the behavior or to get multiple examples.**
- ✓ Successful players on this sports team are less concerned with their past, but are more motivated to pay attention to the here-and-now (Present). **MAPs such as *low Past Orientation/High Present* help players to focus on current challenges without the need to pay attention to past experiences—successes or failures.**
- ✓ Successful players on this sports team are highly interested in having information. This could include data on their opponents as well as knowing the best techniques and strategies for their sport. **MAPs such as *high Information* help motivate players to pursue and evaluate information that can contribute to the best result in success in soccer competition.**

Overall Conclusions of Study

- ✓ The results suggest that there are consistent iWAM motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) among successful players and that these patterns contribute to the successful culture of this team.

- ✓ The motivational patterns of this sports team including a low need for numerous examples to be convinced, a time orientation in the present, and the desire for information are part of what makes this team so successful.
 - ✓ These results strongly support the feasibility of developing a quick, easy-to-administer pattern scoring system that could be used to recruit, screen, and select the best players to recruit. By using such a system, coaches could increase the probability that future players have the motivational and attitudinal patterns that are compatible or consistent with high performance.
 - ✓ A profile of the MAPs of high performance players can provide a basis for talking with those players and to developing lower-performing players with different patterns to the next level. This approach would involve building a model of excellence for high performing players— noting that there may be different models for offensive players, defensive players, and goalies—and teaching coaches how to use the language of influence to improve motivation and performance.
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About the Authors

Carl Harshman is a consultant and founder of The Institute for Work Attitude & Motivation. He is a former academic dean and professor and has published numerous books, articles, and research studies.

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