

University Varsity Men's Soccer Team Study

The Institute's focus on descriptive research attempts to identify the relationship between motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) and the performance of individuals, teams, and organizations. These patterns may also reflect an organization's culture that influences members' beliefs and behaviors, thus contributing to successful performance.

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

This intercollegiate sports team was established 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 some changes with the coaching staff during that time. This team is traditionally ranked in the top 25 soccer teams in the nation and competes for conference titles year after year.

Player Performance Ratings

The Player Performance Rating (PPR) is a measure of how well the player performs in his role on the soccer team. 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 (e.g., Pele or Beckham) 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 professionals 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.

High Performers versus Lower Performers

When comparing *high performers* (>50) to *lower performers* (≤ 50) several significant patterns ($p < .05$) emerged.¹

- High performers were not motivated to wait to respond or to reflect on the situation before responding (*lower Reflecting and Patience pattern*).
- High performers were less concerned with past performance or what happened previously (*lower Past Time pattern*).
- High performers are more interested in working with or getting information (*higher Information Interest Filter for their role*).
- High performers are less concerned with obtaining several examples before they will be convinced (*lower number of examples*).

¹ 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.

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*).

Comparing Coaches and Players

A unique advantage of the Inventory for Work Attitude and Motivation is that comparisons between leaders and subordinates can also be conducted in order to make suggestions for future communication and to better understand any perceived difficulties between these two groups. This unique feature 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. That 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*).
- 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 with 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* help players act quickly and understand coaching through seeing just one example, without being constrained by having to do or practice the behavior.**
- Successful players on this sports team are less concerned with their past achievements and actions but what they can achieve now. **MAPs such as *low Past Orientation* help players to focus on current success without being focused on past success or constrained by past failure.**
- Successful players on this sports team are highly interested in having and processing information about their opponent and knowing the best techniques and strategies for their sport. **MAPs such as *high Information Interest* help players to pursue and evaluate information that will best result in success over their opponent.**

Overall Conclusions of Study

- The results suggest that there are consistent iWAM motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) among successful players and these patterns are what contribute to and establish the strong and successful culture on this team.
- The strong culture of this sports team in addition to the focus on quick execution of coaching instruction, a present orientation, and the desire for knowledge and information are also 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 screen and select the best players to recruit. By using such a system, management could increase the probability that future employees have attitudinal and motivational patterns that are compatible or consistent with the team's defined culture and the motivational and attitudinal patterns present in high-performing players. Note that the patterns may be different for players in different roles. This is most marked in the difference between goal keepers and other players.
- An understanding of the MAPs of successful players can help inform the coaching staff about areas to intervene with players that are unsuccessful or underperforming as well as how to motivate positively players based on the individual's respective motivational and attitudinal patterns.

Research conducted by:

Dr. Carl L. Harshman, Founder & CEO, Institute for Work Attitude & Motivation

Dr. Ryan Hooper, Clinical Psychologist (doctoral student at the time of the research)

Note: A copy of the study is available on request from carl@iWAMinstitute.com