

Performance Culture In Elite Sport: A Systematic Literature Review

Andersen, Trine Lise; Moldenæs, Turid

The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

E-mail: trine.l.andersen@uit.no

The aim of the research

The goal in elite sports is to perform for the purpose of winning. Therefore, there will be a continuous focus on performance improvements. A number of studies have attempted to identify what characterizes successful performance development in elite sport. While sport management researchers have focused on the strategic management level (macro level), sports psychology researchers have focused on the individual level (micro level). Overall, this has led to a blind spot where the relationship between the organization, the coaching team and the athletes have been neglected (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). To fill in this blind spot or gap Cruickshank and Collins (2012, p. 340) have introduced the concept of high-performance cultures, as a precondition for creating high performance athletes and teams. According to them, high-performance cultures leads to repeated or continuous high performance. "Organizational culture is an emerging topic in sport psychology and recent literature has argued that creating and maintaining high-performance cultures is a key function of the sport psychologist" (Henriksen, 2015, p. 141). However, empirical studies are still lacking in this research field (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

In this article, it is reported from a systematic literature review (Hart, 1998, p. 13). The purpose has been to find out the meaning of the concept of performance culture, which athletic fields that have been studied, which factors that are promoting and developing a performance culture and the effects of such a culture in elite sport. This is the first systematic review that investigates this topic in elite sport. The aim is to spot the gap in this new research field and to prepare for further empirical studies. The main reason for doing this review is my PhD project, which is a case study of the Norwegian mens national team in football during the period of 2014–2016. The headcoach had an official statement and goal of changing the culture of the team and to create a high-performance culture.

The review strategy

The initial inclusion criteria were English language articles published in the period of 2000–2016. I started with the search word "high performance culture", but had to extend the search to include "performing environment", "performance team" and "team culture" because high-performance culture as inclusion criteria gave very few hits. A snow-ball approach was used to search for the historical development of the concept of performance culture to find out which were the standard references and the relevant studies in order to answer the research questions of factors and effects. By searching in Scopus, Google Scholar, Ebsco and doing manual searches in journals as Sport Science, Sport Management, Psychology and Sport in Society, I ended up with 15 articles published in the period of 2012–2017. The inclusion criteria also includes articles that refer to Cruickshank and Collins, based on their work on high-performance culture and other studies that have investigated high-performance culture in elite sports.

The findings so far

Performance culture is a young and immature research field. The field is primarily characterized by a few researchers and most of the studies are a result of the ph.d.-work of Cruickshank in collaboration with his supervisors. The studies are mainly related to the theory and research within the field of Change Management and not to the far more established research on organizational cultures. This is also so far one of the main critics of this research field. Furthermore, there seems to be an ongoing debate about which theoretical framework is best suited to study and understand high-performance cultures. The aim of the research seems to have a strong applied focus in which particular sports psychologists want to position themselves to contribute to the development of the performance culture of the elite team. I find two findings of specific interest: (1) No studies have commented on the the concept and definition of high-performance cultures (cf. Cruickschank & Collins, 2012), as a precondition for creating high performance athletes and teams. (2) No studies have so far investigated the effects of a high-performance culture.

Concluding comments

I am still working on this, but there seems to be a strong need for empirical studies in general and more specifically on on-field empirical research. There is also a strong need to discuss and operationalize the concept of performance culture.

References

- Cruickshank, A., & Collins, D. (2012). Culture Change in Elite Sport Performance Teams: Examining and Advancing Effectiveness in the New Era. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 24*, 338–355. doi: 10.1080/10413200.2011.650819
- Cruickshank, A., Collins, D., & Minten, S. (2013). Culture Change in a Professional Sports Team: Shaping Environmental Contexts and Regulating Power. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 8*, 271–290.
- Fletcher, D., & Wagstaff, C. R. D. (2009). Organizational psychology in elite sport: Its emergence, application and future. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 10*, 427–434. doi: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.03.009
- Gilmore, S. (2013). Culture change in a professional sports team: Shaping environmental contexts and regulating power: A commentary. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 8*, 305–307.
- Henriksen, K. (2015). Developing a High-Performance Culture: A Sport Psychology Intervention From an Ecological Perspective in Elite Orienteering. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 6*, 141–153. doi: 10.1080/21520704.2015.1084961