



**GRA 19003 -
Master Thesis**

”The mundanity of excellence”

*A case study of performance development
in a Norwegian top level football club*

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The school takes no responsibility for the methods used, results found, and
conclusions drawn.»

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Andreas Grøgaard

Summary

This case study constitutes a comprehensive and profound documentation of performance development in Odds Ballklubb's sporting unit (Odd). The members are focusing on improving the nature and quality of the processes that influence results. Minor and mundane initiatives are fitted together in a synthesized whole. This practice is promoted by an evident and pervaded performance culture. Noteworthy, their working methods have changed both in response to experiences with trial-and-error experimentation, and as a result of searching alternative routines. They have utilized intelligent failures, in particular through process focus, and failure legitimation. Furthermore, the team of coaches has displayed critical reflection and situational awareness by seeking to stay ahead of the development, utilizing technology and knowledge in everyday practice, as well as demonstrating flexibility and sensitivity to current operations. Accordingly, Odd is also demonstrating several manifest signs on organizational learning. Apparently, these arrangements have promoted methodical performance development making the club competitive in a dynamic and highly competitive elite sports environment. Odd is not much different from the teams they outperform. The individuals do not trigger overwhelming excitement. They are only "ordinary" people that do particular plain things to perform great in top-level football. They do not simply do more of the same exercises, preparations, and evaluations. They do them better. The difference lies mainly in their approach and consistency to care greatly about the minor and mundane details. Quality in every details inevitable add up. How the team of coaches and players are practicing is rather interesting: It is very mundane. And although skeptics and malicious tongues

initially would state that this finding does not induce particular excitement in itself, that is actually the point. Apparently, the simple doing of certain small tasks generates huge results (Chambliss, 1989). Mindfulness and obsessive perfection throughout the underlying processes result in truly extraordinary success. This is "the mundanity of excellence".

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1.0 Introduction

In a labour market characterized by a dynamic nature, fierce competition, high uncertainty, complexity, interrelatedness, and speed (Brooks, Weatherston & Wilkinson, 2010), the twenty-first-century organization must be predicated on constant change, not stability (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). These attributes are also manifest in Norwegian top-level football. The market has become more global, and the Norwegian clubs experience hard competition from more prosperous foreign actors. In order to be competitive and survive, the clubs need to offer something more than lucrative wages (Pedersen, 2013). A key to success is continuous learning and performance development (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

Starbuck & Hedberg (2003) document that most organizations manage to achieve success, however, only a minority manage to recreate the success. Organizations tend to emit the same responses despite unstable and changing stimuli (Weick, 1984). Thus, they are at risk of implementing unfavorable practices of organizational learning and development. The ever-changing and competitive elite sports environment demands for an organization to improve continuously also during times of success. This implies being capable of detecting deviations even when performing great. From this reasoning, there is a significant potential to put performance development into more well-functioning systems, and to integrate analytical experience-based learning processes that increase the probability of also recreating great performances (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003). By achieving this, an organization might balance the imposed and inevitable short-term result focus with vital long-term performance development.

Odd has succeeded in recreating wins and highly respectable table positions in the Norwegian League the last few years. Nevertheless, such manifest outcomes are regarded merely as insufficient indicators of the nature and quality of the underlying processes. George Canning once said that «I can prove anything by statistics except the truth». One might argue that in professional football, statistics are merely indications which with mathematical precision draw lines from unverified assumptions to hasty and insufficient conclusions. By conducting an in-depth investigation of Odd, this study focuses on how the sporting unit operates to develop capacities that may strengthen the club's ability to perform

better than their competitors. In order to nuance their everyday practice, the investigation will focus on three main proportions: Player development, team organizing, and leadership. In this study, player development involves systematic initiatives that are improving the individual player's performance (individual focus). Team organizing encompasses development of relational and structural factors that have influence on team-based performance (collective focus). The leadership aspect focuses on the head coach's sensegiving of his leadership philosophy. This implies the process of ingraining the other coaches, supportive staff, and players in his way of conducting performance development.

Based on a qualitative approach to everyday interactions, the focus of attention regards how the team of coaches is planning, implementing, and evaluating processes that regards learning and performance development. This encompass how the team of coaches manages to balance the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). Odd's practical conditions, organizational model, and their leadership philosophy are considered as latent variables that constitute the context. This social and cultural context of the phenomenon studied is crucial for understanding the operation of causal explanation (Maxwell, 2004). The theoretical framework is represented by theory on performance development, performance culture, and organizational learning. In order to produce profound understanding, both participant observation and semi-structured interviews are conducted. The study investigates whether the recent success can be attributed to methodical practice. It constitutes a comprehensive and profound documentation of performance development in a Norwegian top-level football club.

1.1 Structure

This thesis is divided into seven sections: 1) The first section encompasses the background for choice of topic and research question. This section also dives into Odd's resources and practical conditions, organizational structure, and leadership philosophy. 2) The second section introduces the research objective, and research question. The potential contribution of the thesis is also documented. 3) The third section presents a review of literature that is considered of great importance in order to understand essential issues of the thesis. This includes theory that regards

performance development, performance culture, and organizational learning. This foundation will also help the reader follow the reasoning behind the progress of the study. 4) The fourth section presents the methodology. This section begins with the research design, which includes an elaboration of the case study approach, qualitative research, and data gathering in terms of participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Thereafter, the thesis introduces the target sample, and the interview guide. The procedures that regards analysis of data, and transcribing and coding are then documented. This is followed by a discussion of the quality of findings and conclusions, in terms of validity, reliability, and generalizability, respectively. The section concludes with some ethical reflections. 5) The fifth section presents the findings and analysis. This imply documentation of how and why Odd's sporting unit currently is practicing their working methods. Furthermore, the findings are compared with the theoretical framework, and rival explanations are proposed. 6) The sixth section encompasses discussion about the study. This includes further elaboration on the research question, the main conclusion, and some implications of this. This section concludes with documenting some limitations of the study, and make proposals for future research. The seventh and final section of the thesis encompasses references, and appendix. The appendix includes the information letter and informed consent, the two interview guides, and the preliminary thesis report.

1.2 Context

The following paragraphs present the framework that should be taken into account when interpreting the analysis and findings in this case study. It encompasses Odd Ballklubb's a) history, b) resources and practical conditions, c) organizational structure, and d) leadership philosophy.

1.2.1 Odds Ballklubb's history

The organization was initially founded as the sports association "IF Odd" March 29, 1885. In the articles of association, the stated objective is to «unfold knowledge and competence within all sports».¹ Their brand was determined a

¹ <http://www.odd.no/club-history/article/n2r5q9co87kd1ashr38y4x7wo/title/odds-ballklubbs-historie>

silver arrow with "Odd" intagliated on the feather, and their kit was composed of a white upper part, black shorts, and white socks. Virtually nine years later, March 31, 1894, Odds Ballklubb was established as a subgroup within IF Odd. This subunit was founded with the purpose of practicing football primarily.

In the times to come, Odds Ballklubb created a proud history. In particular, from their first cup final in 1902 until 1931, the club became champions eleven times (1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1913, 1915, 1919, 1922, 1924, 1926, and 1931). Adding on their championship in 2000, their twelve triumphs stand as the all-time record in Norway. As insinuated by the discrepancy of these achievements, the club experienced more struggle and adversity in the second half of the 20th century. After fluctuating between the second and third level of Norwegian football, Odds Ballklubb returned to the better company in 1998. At this point, the elite team was named Odd Grenland. The name modification might be seen as «a contribution to promote positive fuss for the geographical area of Grenland, as well as demonstrating that the club exists for more than the inhabitants of Skien».² As will be documented later, this rationale has been further developed, extended, and cultivated in terms of a county profile, "Telemarksprofilen", and slogans such as "Telemarks stolthet" (the pride of Telemark), and "heltene fra Telemark" (the heroes of Telemark). Over a ten-year period, the club time and again ended approximately in the middle of the table in Tippeligaen (level one in Norwegian football league system), before relegating in 2007. In accordance with this incident, a new sporting unit was announced. This unit constitutes the subject matter in this thesis. Odds Ballklubb experienced success immediately. After a superior victory in Adeccoligaen (level two in Norwegian football at that time), the club has further gathered significantly more points in Tippeligaen than earlier. Reasonably, this has also resulted in remarkably better final table positions. In 2014 they won the bronze medals. In addition, the club reached the semi-finals in the cup championship four years in a row, before winning the silver medals (losing finalist) in 2014. In 2015, Odds Ballklubb further expanded their horizons, by experiencing great success in the Europe League. After conquering three relatively strong opponents in a convincing manner, they met their superiority in

² <http://www.odd.no/club-history/article/n2r5q9co87kd1ashr38y4x7wo/title/odds-ballklubbs-historie>

the play-off for the group stage of the competition. Nevertheless, these experiences are considered important elements in a process of continuous learning and performance development. By Norwegian standards, Odds Ballklubb is considered a small organization. Nevertheless, they are well-known for their achievements with relative scarce resources and economic capital.

1.2.2 Resources and practical conditions

Odd has been imposed a situation characterized by other requirements for success than certain competitors. The club has relatively scarce resources, and lacks economic strength. This imply being competitive neither in the international nor the national player market. Nevertheless, the club has demonstrated significant action force within a restricted regulation framework. The sporting environment is well-known for its quality, and for having success with developing own players (Haugen, 2014). Based on a progress-oriented mindset, the club has integrated general competence with both domain-specific knowledge and functional expertise. This foundation is adjusted to the players, and the team as a whole. Apparently, Odd has found a way of «mobilizing competence in the team to manage getting the most out of every member» (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

One should be cautious with drawing parallels between economy and results/performances. Nevertheless, although difficult to compare clubs, often the sporting results are tightly connected to economy. If Tippeligaen was to be settled on the club's budgets, Odd would in general have ended in significantly poorer table positions than they actually have under the current sporting unit's administration. These budgets are far from defining the sporting units' actual resources and practical conditions. Although there are some deviations from the norm, one thing is for certain: Odd has had sporting success with significantly more restricted resources than certain competitors.

Historically, the annual reports have documented concerns associated with Odd's economic situation. Reasonably, this status has had direct influence on the sporting unit's practical conditions, and economic power. The club is neither competitive in the international nor the national player market. Nevertheless, their practical conditions have improved significantly throughout the last seasons. This is in direct conjunction with their sporting success, and the economic revenues

this has accompanied. Nevertheless, much can also be attributed their cautious and efficient operations and practice. The leader of the Norsk Toppfotball (the Norwegian elite soccer professional association), Leif Øverland, points to enhanced stability in management, stricter financial monitoring, and supervision from NFF (the Football Association of Norway), as well as enhanced eagerness to learn from other clubs. He further states that «*gone are the high salaries, and the straws in local budgets*».³ Odd has imposed a wage cap, and business owners experience belonging to the team, and the club as a whole. This is for example in absolute contrast to what chairman in Vålerenga Fotball AS, Henrik A. Christensen, states is the case in Oslo. Odd's marketing strategy and pursuit of a local profile have also resulted in higher attendances at their home games. Furthermore, it has boosted the population's general engagement in the club. Overall, these initiatives have contributed to solid financial statements.

There have been some vital improvements in Odd's practical conditions with the present team of coaches in power. The club has invested in various training equipment and devices, such as the athlete tacking monitor system Catapult, treadmills and ergometer bicycles, relaxation premises and so forth. These facilities have professionalized their daily training, and facilitated a better foundation to manage the total workload. Furthermore, the sporting unit has been strengthened with both a player developer, and a fitness coach. Accordingly, they have increased their internal competence and knowledge, and facilitated a more appropriate distribution of responsibility and work tasks. In addition to the annual training camp in La Manga, the team has also gone on mini camps to Sweden and Denmark. In this way, they have utilized excellent facilities elsewhere when the climate has put restrictions back home. This has also facilitated great focus and preparation in a vital period of the preseason. Also, in order to compensate for tough runs of fixtures, Odd has afforded charter flights to some away matches. This has been advantageous with respect to strain, recovery, and logistics. In sum, these improvements constitute important parts of Odd's working methods.

³ <http://www.hegнар.no/Nyheter/Naeringsliv/2016/03/Kanonaar-for-toppkubbene>

1.2.3 Organizational structure

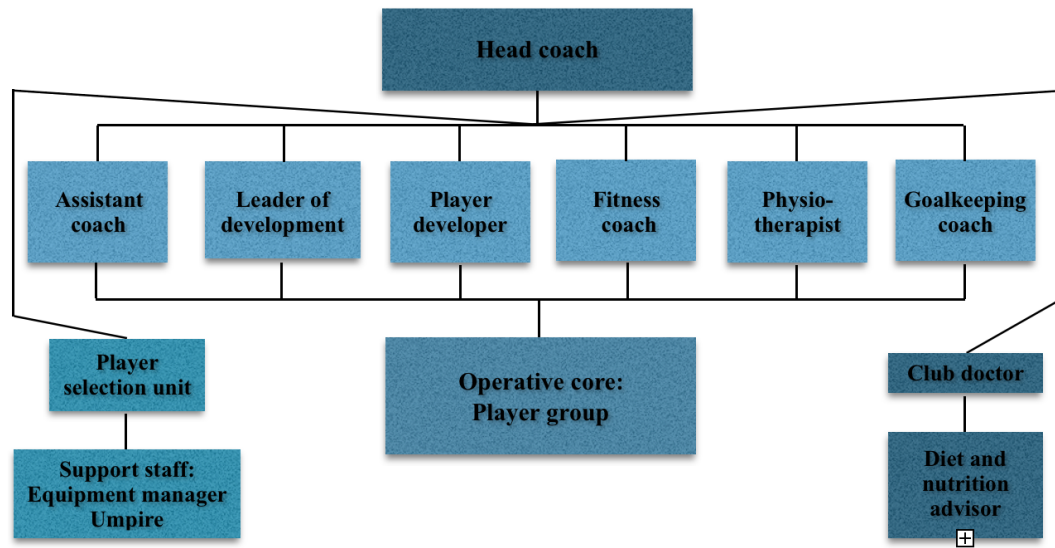


Figure 1: Organizational structure in Odd Ballklubb's sporting unit

Figure 1 is based on descriptions from different informants with regards to working responsibilities and duties. This sketch gives an account for the daily working arrangement that is manifest in theory. Nevertheless, in practice, the work and interaction are more of an informal nature. There is an evident power hierarchy on top, however, there is no internal power-struggle in the various levels, and the sporting unit practices an organic system.

The head coach has the complete sporting responsibility. He is responsible for everything that concerns working in a football club; from planning, implementation, and evaluation of training sessions, to the team selection, style of play, and match management. Furthermore, he is totally accountable for the team's sporting results.

Although being placed below the head coach, the actors in the second level are as much involved in the daily work. The assistant coach could also be named first team coach, as he is involved in both the planning and implementation of training sessions. He is working closely with the head coach in all daily work and duties, and states that they are «almost like an old married couple». Furthermore, he is mainly responsible for analysis of set pieces.

The player developer also functions as assistant coach. His area of expertise regards attacking players and strikers. Besides, he is responsible for additional trainings and video supervision. He is present at training with the youth

team, Toppidrettsgymnaset i Telemark (the local college of elite sports), and the first team.

The leader of development is mainly responsible for securing continuity in the holistic development work in the club. Furthermore, he is responsible for coding matches, in which thereafter are analyzed through fruitful and productive discussions with the head coach, the assist coach, and the player developer. In addition, he functions as assistant coach, and has got the responsibility for the second team in matches. He also has several administrative duties, such as negotiations with new players and their clubs, contract signings, logistics when traveling and so forth. Accordingly, he functions as somewhat a glue in the organization.

The fitness coach and physiotherapist are responsible for the physical part of the training - both individually, and at team level. They are also facilitating for the players to be ready and fit for training. This includes the "prep" (release, control/muscle activation, functional strength, frequency-training), and warming-up. They are practicing intimate interaction in which implies daily conversations and discussions with regards to following-up on the players' condition. They consider everything from subjective indicators such as quality of sleep, energy level, playing readiness, strain and load on previous training, urine analysis, stiffness, soreness, and pain, to more objective indications collected from the GPS-system, such as meterage ran, number of high-intensity runs and sprints, and "player load" (a measure of intensity of training).

The goalkeeping coach has responsibility for the technical training and individual following up of the keepers. He has expert competence in this field, and obviously the broadest foundation to make judgements of the keepers. Although the head coach has the final word when it comes to picking the first team keeper, the goalkeeping coach also has a hand in that responsibility.

The player selection unit functions as trustees, as spokesmen, and as a link to the team of coaches, as well as the club as a whole. It consists of three selected players, that are considered particularly influential and vital to the team. This unit has regular dialogues with the team of coaches.

The support staff provide logistic assistance and support to the team of coaches and players outside the daily operating workflow, and the various training

fields. Their function is regarded essential for the overall development, and in optimizing the everyday training routines. They prepare the training equipment, such as balls, bottles, kits and so forth.

The diet and nutrition advisor is employed in a little posture. He is hired mainly to examine the players' body composition, in terms of percentage of body fat and weight. In particular instances, he also gives some advice on (low-carb) diets and nutrition, and follow-up on those players that are not satisfying the template of being a top-level athlete at Odd.

The club doctor has a more peripheral role in the club. He has got a private practice, and his dialogues with the team are mainly by phone. Primarily, he is in close contact with the physiotherapist. In critical cases, the players visit his office. Furthermore, he implements all the required affairs from NFF and UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations), such as blood tests, heart tests and so forth.

1.2.4 Leadership philosophy

The head coach has a clear philosophy that is built on four basic principles (see figure 2). These are meant to characterize the sporting unit.

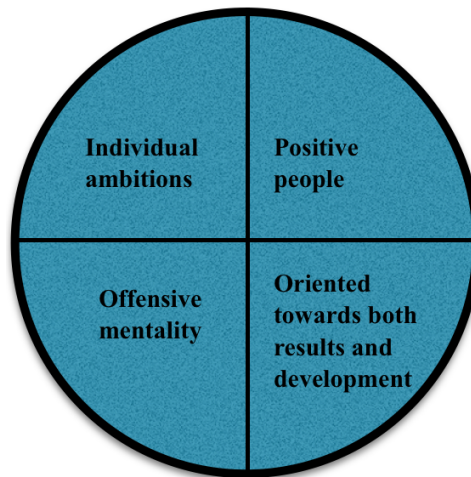


Figure 2: The head coach's philosophy

First, the sporting shall be characterized by people that have personal ambitions. This does not encompass ambitions on behalf of others, rather it involves exclusively individual goals, and the willingness to take the consequences of these ambitions. This implies starting with the man in the mirror, and set demands on

yourself before others. Second, as the nature of the business is «to win, and win, and win», and the pressure is constant and massive, it is important to be surrounded by positive energy. Positive people are considered particularly important in top-level sports. Accordingly, the head coach has been cynical in eliminating individuals that have a tendency to focus on the negative things, and who does not manage to keep attention to the positives. This implies to both players and coaches, but also supporting staff. Nevertheless, the positivism should not tip to the naive, and the ideal does not exclusively imply being cheerful and happy. It might in fact include also being furious and angry. In this way one might indicate that you care about your work place. Accordingly, these feelings are based on a positive mindset. The third principle regards an offensive mentality in everyone. You shall enjoy challenges, and approach situations with great spirit. Offensive people are considered fabulous, however, it is vital also to take the consequences. Lastly, the sporting unit shall be both oriented towards results and development. Focusing on results is considered important, however, being exclusively oriented towards results might provoke stress. Therefore, it is important to recognize what kind of development that is necessary to reach those goals. This implies being development-oriented. These criteria must go hand in hand.

2.0 Research questions and objectives of the thesis

2.1 Research objective and research questions

Odd's results are manifest. These are documented in black and white, and cannot be questioned. The club gets three points by defeating its opponents; it wins the bronze medals in Tippeligaen by ending third; it fights for "kongepokalen" by reaching the cup final in the Norwegian Football Cup; and it proves its proficiency by overcoming great foreign clubs in the European Cup. These represent quantifiable manifestations of Odd's achievement. By Norwegian standards, the prominent success of Odd is well known. Nevertheless, that is not to say it is well understood by club leaders, players, spectators, competitors, and other stakeholders. Performance is often measured as actual results, or outcomes. Another way to consider performance is what people do to create the results. This study takes a closer look at the development of capacities that are essential to win matches. By keeping this focus, we can see how and why the plant grows to become a flower in bloom (Chambliss, 1989). Therefore, this study concentrates on a) how Odd develops individual players, organize the team, and practice leadership in light of specific theory, and b) what are the key factors to their comparative advantage. The objective is to conduct an in depth investigation of the daily operations and methodology of a proficient football club. This encompass focusing on the performance development process, in contrast to a more result-focused approach, as within the performance management literature. Based on this reasoning, the following research questions are deduced: *In light of theory that regards continuous performance development, how is Odd Ballklubb's team of coaches planning, implementing, and evaluating processes that characterize their player development, team organizing, and leadership? Which underlying processes have been decisive to their permanent capacity and achievement?*

2.2 Contribution

The performance management literature is comprehensive. Several studies identify and measure performances of individuals and teams. These are mainly focused on outcomes, rather than the processes that create these outcomes. This

study contributes with in-depth insight to the underlying learning and performance development processes of a top level football club. The focus is on the details in prioritizing, working methods, and evaluating processes that characterize Odd's player development, team organizing, and leadership. In this way, the objective is to document internal affairs that contribute to the final product. This study takes an organizational psychological perspective. From an economic perspective or structural perspective, the discussion would have been different.

3.0 Literature review

In use of the case study approach, it is difficult to establish causal explanations (Bennett & Elman, 2006). It is more manageable and convenient to demonstrate how a phenomenon can be understood and interpreted in light of specific theory. Accordingly, the following literature review will facilitate the subsequent findings and analysis to be understood in light of theory that regards continuous performance development. It constitutes literature and research that are considered relevant in order to answer the research question. The theories shed light on the prioritizing, working methods, and evaluation that characterize systematic and reliable learning and development. The section is initiated with concretizing the distinction between performance development as process in contrast to result management. Thereafter, theory on performance culture and organizational learning are elaborated. This includes mobilization of resources, and organizing for continuous learning and performance development. The section concludes with a summary of the literature.

3.1 Performance development

Roughly speaking, performance development can be oriented towards either processes or results. The performance management literature has been concerned with identifying and measuring performances of individuals and teams. This include mainly documentation of results. Based on these appraisals, initiatives are implemented to develop performances, and to align the performances with the strategic goals of the organization (Aguinis, 2009). This implies an economic man perspective. Accordingly, the emphasis is on incentives, external motivation, and rewards in order to achieve results. In contrast, the process approach underlines the importance of learning and performance development in relations and interaction. This implies a psychological/sociological perspective. The emphasis is on the underlying processes that lead to the final outcomes. Results are regarded merely as insufficient indicators of the quality of the process. Accordingly, performance development is about the nature and quality of the process that influence results. Andersen (2009) clarifies this vital distinction by an anecdote about the working methods of the well-known speed skater Johan Olav Koss who

won three gold medals and set three world record in the Lillehammer Olympics in 1994. In speed skating, athletes have traditionally been "seconded" in relation to a predetermined plan (scheme) with lap times aiming at a specific result. This is still the common procedure within the sport. In contrast, Koss together with his coach found that it was better to focus on mastering his skating technique as best as possible (process focus) also during competition. By implementing this strategy, one is more able to see the underlying factors and grasp the whole picture. Accordingly, you are establishing a better basis to draw the right inferences, and thus make adjustments and include new initiatives and actions in order to further develop and improve (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009). By keeping focus on the *processes*, we can see how and why the plant grows to become a flower in bloom (Chambliss, 1989).

According to MacKay (2007), improving performances will not just happen, they must be managed. This statement implies that great leadership is a matter of necessity in order to achieve great organizational performances. Although leadership basically is about promoting performances (Vik, 2007), performance leadership encompasses the more concrete and continuous activities of determining performance objectives, evaluate performances, as well as providing feedback on those performances in order to further develop and improve. In other words, performance development constitutes the three practices of a) assessing and securing performance *before* it appears, b) correcting *during* the process, in order to ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction, as well as c) providing feedback and rewards *after* implementing the process. Those factors that influence performance reasonable diverge from one case to another, and from corporation to corporation. Thus, performance leadership is about ways to strengthen the most essential features that create the results (Vik, 2007). In Odd, this includes balancing the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). Roughly summarized, all initiatives utilized to guide and motivate subordinate's performances constitute a part of performance leadership (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009). In this way, performance development has the potential of facilitating adjustments and continuous improvement of

organizational performances in a changing and modern working environment (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009).

3.2 Organizational culture

In general, performance culture is regarded as a form of organizational culture. Accordingly, it is reasonable first to clarify this concept. As with several other concepts within social science, it appears difficult to agree on one singular definition of the culture notion (Bang, 2013). This is illustrated by Kroeber & Kluckhohn's (1952) presentation of 164 different definitions. The concept is often used in everyday speech. Such informal circumstances are often marked by popular definitions/metaphors with jargon. Some examples are "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982), "the corporate's DNA", "the non-verbal communication code" (Cremer, 1993), "the secret sauce" (Smith, 2012), and "the root of the organization" (Greenberg, 2011). These descriptions are easily conceivable. Nevertheless, it might be discussed to what degree they are embracing the relative vast and abstract aspect of the organization. The research literature presents definitions of more comprehensive, and precise character. Bang (2013) incorporates the most applied core elements in scientific articles and journals in his elucidation: «Organizational culture is those sets of common norms, values, and perceptions that develop in an organization when the members are interacting with each other and the surroundings, and which are demonstrated in terms of the members' actions and attitudes at work». This definition embraces the most essential aspects of the concept. Accordingly, it is used as frame of reference in this thesis.

3.3 Performance culture

By regarding performance culture as a type of organizational culture, it might be stated that a performance culture implies emphasis on valuing and aspiring performances (Skarbøvik, 2014). In this regard, it is essential to clarify: Performance culture does not necessarily imply continuous success. It involves a fundamental mindset that pursues a trying and failing approach, based on courage and desire to *constantly improve* (Vik, 2007; Andersen & Sæther, 2008). In sport, success is defined as superiority of performance during competition. This regards

the *results* of the accomplishment, and not the execution in itself. Accordingly, as pointed out by Chambliss (1989), one might be at risk of neglecting how the plant grows to become a flower in bloom. In a performance culture, focus is on the *process* that leads to the outcome, and not only on the sub-goals or the final outcome in themselves. In this way, a performance culture is balancing a "performance climate" with a "mastery climate" (see figure 3).

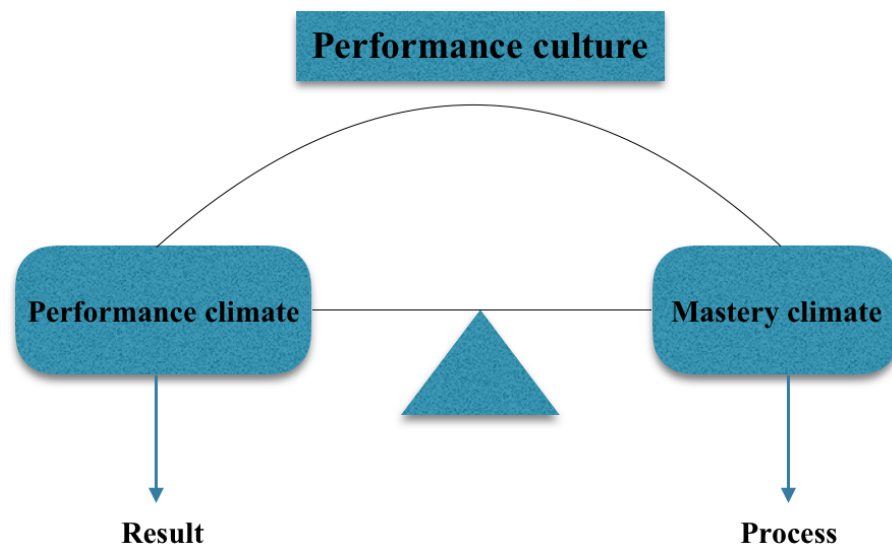


Figure 3: The duplex focus in a performance culture⁴

3.3.1 Characteristics of performance culture

There are several basic characteristics of a performance culture. As indicated above, an important aspect is to practice a balanced focus, in terms of keeping attention to mastering the underlying work tasks and processes, and not becoming too centered on the obvious and manifest results and outcomes. Another important characteristic regards respect for both the collective and the particular individuals. On one hand, Stensbøl (2012) emphasizes the *individual focus*, in terms of individual goals concerning results and development; mastering focus, in terms of measuring one's own progress; evident clarification of expectations; involvement and accountability; valuation of the individuals; feedback, and necessary support and follow-up; mood and humor; and an outlook at mistakes as learning experiences. On the other hand, to pursuit interaction and mobilize a strong collective setting is decisive (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). This implies a *collective focus*. This includes a strong inner order telling that «we are performing together»,

⁴ Professor Svein S. Andersen's illustration

«we are a team, not a group», and that «although having individual goals, we are responsible for the whole» (Stensbøl, 2012). Everyone is responsible for building the culture (Stensbøl, 2012). In this regard, Andersen & Sæther (2008) emphasize the necessity of some essential collective elements: Establishing a realistic sense of collective responsibility for the anchoring and development of sociability and solidarity; gaining a clear understanding of challenges and areas that need to be strengthened to improve competence mobilization; and stimulate awareness of that the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. In order to succeed with a collective identity, it is important to pursue a shared understanding of activities and value creation; shared understanding and acceptance of strategies and plans; and shared understanding of roles and contribution in association with the strategy (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

Summarized by Andersen & Sæther (2008), the vitality of performance culture is *continuous development*, organization and mobilization of human resources to achieve *innovation and flexible solutions*. In order to have success, the cultural agreement should provide meaning, direction and support for *ambitious goals and high demands*, and serve as the basis for *constructive and dynamic interaction* (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). In order to enhance the ability of mastering, it is decisive to settle on *offensive goals*, and face the consequences with a positive and patient attitude (Stensbøl, 2012). This implies willingness to do whatever is necessary to achieve objectives.

Interestingly, the prerequisites of a performance culture are identifiable in the theories of performance development and organizational learning. Within a performance culture, making mistakes is regarded as a fundament for learning. Further development is achievable through knowledge, and experience from failure. According to Stensbøl (2012), this implies learning to cope with setbacks, finding motivation in defeats, being good at analyzing why success was not accomplished, and taking responsibility for performances and development instead of blaming others. This facilitates a culture for *brutal openness* (Stensbøl, 2012). Tensions and conflicts are welcomed, as they are often solved in constructive manners. This contributes to further development of the organization. Furthermore, culture is viewed as an important precondition for effective leadership. It is widely acknowledged that leadership is a vital element to achieve

performance culture within an organization (e.g., Kaas, Kaggestad & Kristiansen, 2007; Vik, 2007; Andersen & Sæther, 2008; Stensbøl, 2012). Performance culture provides a collective identity, and links formal structure and authority with informal mandates and processes (Andersen & Sæther, 2008)

3.3.2 Organizing for performance culture through sociability and solidarity

Based on research concerning decisive factors for achieving outstanding results with "ordinary" people, both in business and professional sports, Andersen & Sæther (2008) identify main dimensions and key elements for mobilizing a performance culture (see figure 4).

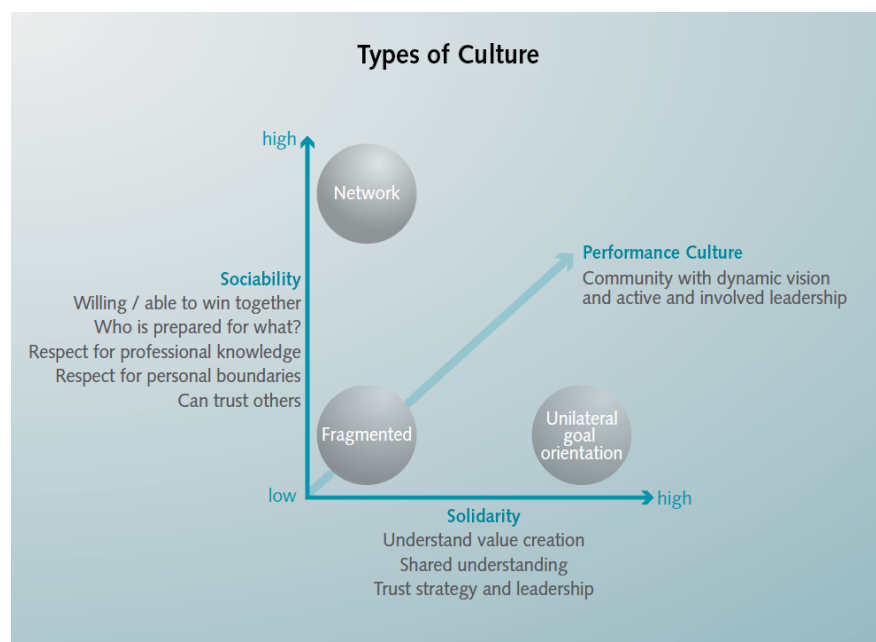


Figure 4: Types of culture (Andersen & Sæther, 2008)

The model presents two main dimensions: Sociability and solidarity. Argued by Andersen & Sæther (2008), sociability might be facilitated by five key factors: 1) willingness and ability to engage in active interaction, 2) intimate knowledge of each person's strong and weak sides, 3) respect for professional competence, 4) respect for personal boundaries, and 5) basic trust in work-related relationships. Nevertheless, in order to create harmony, the agents also need to be attuned in their efforts. Solidarity is assumed to promote essential direction in the processes. Andersen & Sæther (2008) document four key factors that facilitate this attribute: 1) shared understanding of activities and value creation; vision and business concept, 2) shared understanding and acceptance of strategies, and plans intended

to realize the vision and business concept, 3) shared understanding of roles and contribution in association with strategy, and 4) employees' faith in the top leader.

These dimensions are presented as fundamental preconditions for mobilizing a performance culture. Nevertheless, certain conditions that regard both the subordinates and the leaders should also be present. Andersen & Sæther (2008) argue that subordinates must have high ambitions, as well as being oriented towards innovation and value creation. Regarding leaders at all levels, active and involving attitudes towards subordinates appear decisive. In addition, they must serve as contributors to an operative and reflecting culture development. Accordingly, a performance culture imposes relatively strict requirements to both subordinates and leaders. Nevertheless, a great performance culture appears vitalizing and motivating, as it promotes direction for the organization and its members (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Thus, it contributes to great performance.

3.4 Organizational learning

Organizational learning involves the process through which organizational units change and adapt as a result of experience (Argote & Ophir, 2002). This might be complicated in itself. The process is made even more complex due to the fluctuating nature of environments. A specific routine may produce different outcomes at different times, or different routines may produce the same outcome at different times (Levitt & March, 1988). This imposes requirements of learning quickly and precisely. Accordingly, organizational learning can be perceived as a form of intelligence. Routines and beliefs change in response to direct organizational experience through trial-and-error experimentation, and search from a pool of alternative routines (Levitt & March, 1988). This process allows the organization to stay competitive in an ever-changing environment. With regards to continuous learning and development, analytical evaluation and reflection are essential. The following sections present two strategies with respect to organizational learning: "The strategy of small losses", and "the strategy of a mindful organization". These encompass Sitkin's (1992) reasoning of utilizing small losses as a learning arena, and Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld's (2008) theory

of mindfulness, respectively. Thereafter, these theories are integrated and presented in terms of how to organize for organizational learning.

3.4.1 Learning through failure: The strategy of small losses

Both trial-and-error learning and incremental search depend on the evaluation of outcomes as successes or failures (Levitt & March, 1988). Common sense suggests that failure is something to be avoided. Accordingly, there is a widespread trend to avoid failure and losses. Nevertheless, Sitkin (1992) argues that failure is an essential prerequisite for effective organizational learning and adaptation. This does not exclude the benefits of success. Success can be advantageous in several ways, such as to stimulate confidence, persistence, motivation, security and satisfaction, as well as to increase the coordinated pursuit of common goals and values, and enhance efficiency (Sitkin, 1992). However, success tends to encourage the maintenance of status quo. This might not be favorable within a market characterized by a dynamic nature, like professional sports (Bartlett, Gratton & Rolf, 2006). Sitkin (1992) documents four liabilities associated with previously successful outcomes: Complacency, restricted search and attention, risk-aversion, and homogeneity. Success tends to send reinforcing signals telling that no corrective actions are needed. This reduces the motivation to pursue new approaches. It also tends to induce low levels of attention, and restricted search for new information (Sitkin, 1992). Furthermore, Kahneman & Tversky (1979) document that while failure tends to provoke risk-taking behavior, success is associated with risk-averse decision-making. The "never change a winning team" spirit might also generate an unfavorable homogeneity in operating procedures and personnel. From a learning and development point of view, it might also neglect suggestions for change, and potentially even more advantageous practices. Success obviously promotes organizational reliability, which is positively associated with short term performance. Nevertheless, this practice might be at cost of long-term performance (Sitkin, 1992). Starbuck & Hedberg (2003) document that most organizations manage to achieve success, however, only a minority manage to recreate the success. It might be unfavorable to commit the same responses to unstable and changing stimuli (Weick, 1984).

Based on these notions, Sitkin (1992) argues that if managed in an adequate way, small losses might foster organizational learning. Modest levels of failure can complement the previously mentioned liabilities of success. Failure should not be pursued for its own sake. It is a means to an end, not the end in itself. The goal is learning (Sitkin, 1992). In other words, not all failures are equally adept at facilitating learning. However, those failures that foster learning can be labelled "intelligent failures" (Sitkin, 1992). Learning from failures encourages exploration, and facilitates for an organization to be resilient to change (Scott & Vessey, 2000). This is particularly effective in a changing environment. Thus, short-term failures might be favorable and intelligent when seeking long-term success.

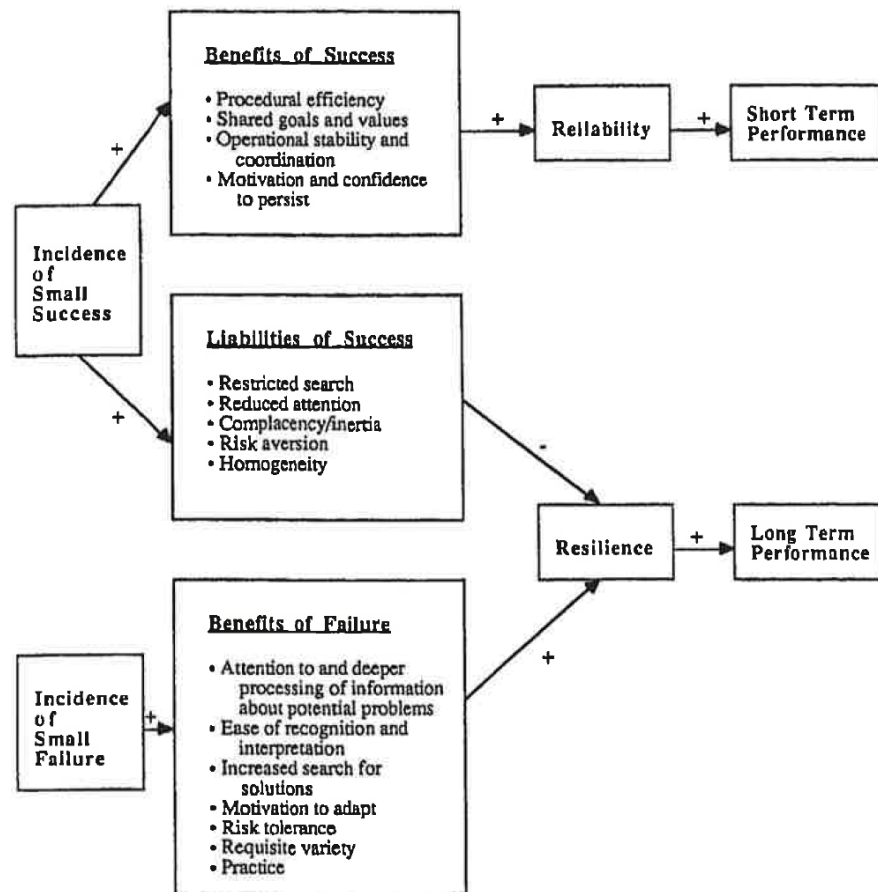


Figure 5: The benefits and liabilities of success and failure (Sitkin, 1992)

Sitkin (1992) documents four categories of organizational conditions that must be in place in order to facilitate learning from intelligent failures (see figure 6). These encompass that 1) the focus should be on the process rather than the outcomes of organizational learning, 2) the organization should legitimize

intelligent failure, 3) the organizational culture and design must be such that the members can fail without suffering reprisals from the failures, and 4) the focus should be on the systems that will produce failure rather than on the individuals, because people do not fail in sufficiently systematic ways for the outcomes to be useful.

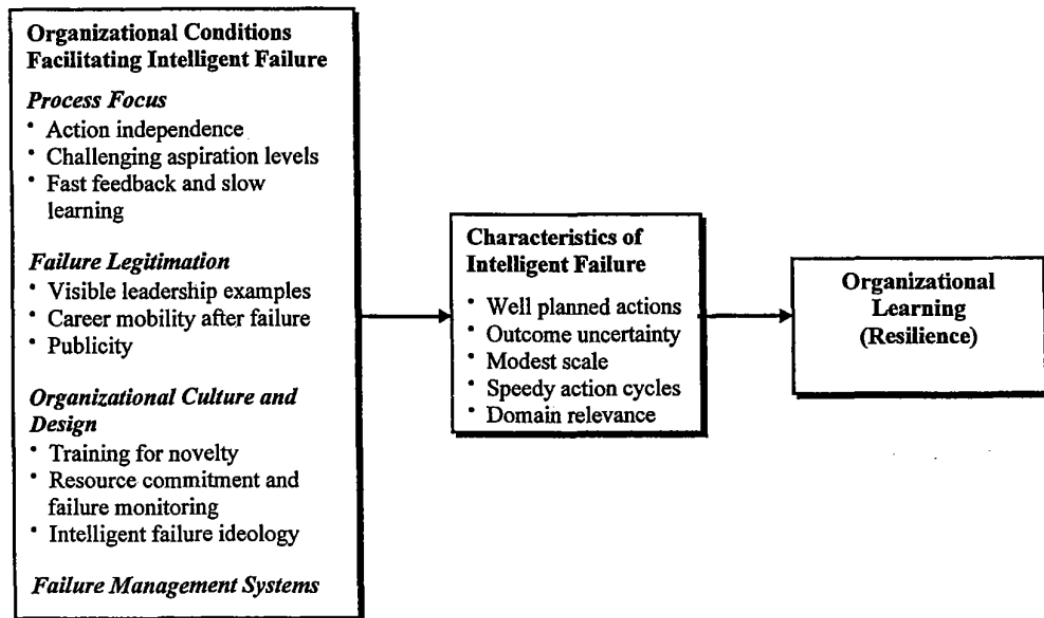


Figure 6: Organizational conditions fostering intelligent failure and learning (Sitkin, 1992)

A common method to achieve a final result is to divide the overall goal into several subgoals. This method facilitates the experience of small wins during the process. This might boost motivation, eager, and self-confidence (Weick, 1984). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there are some potentially significant liabilities of such success. In contrast to common understanding, arranging for several subgoals does not imply a process focus. In contrast, it involves only a divided result focus. Sitkin (1992) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that small wins also constitute small flops, and that this insight provides a significant learning potential. These small losses are characterized as vital elements that might promote continuous learning and development. In order to utilize failures in an intelligent way (the strategy of small losses), Sitkin (1992) argues that five criteria must be fulfilled: Failures must 1) result from thoughtfully planned actions, 2) have uncertain outcomes, 3) be of modest scale, 4) be executed and responded to with alacrity, and 5) take place in domains that are

familiar enough to permit effective learning. With respect to the last point, it is necessary for the actors to have sufficient knowledge within their discipline in order to implement precise observations, relevant interpretations, and thereof reliable learning. The first four elements emphasize characteristics of an effective learning cycle. These are in alignment with Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld's (2008) theory of mindful organizations.

3.4.2 *A mindful organization*

Langer (2000) specifies the concept of mindfulness as a state of active awareness characterized by the continual creation and refinement of categories, an openness to new information, and a willingness to view contexts from multiple perspectives. In contrast, being mindless, colloquially speaking, is compared to being on automatic pilot (Langer, 2000; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). This implies fixation on a single perspective without awareness that things could be otherwise. Instead of being situated in the present, actively drawing new distinctions, noticing new things, as we do when we are mindful, when we are mindless we rely on distinctions and categories drawn in the past (Langer, 2000). When we are mindless, our behavior is rule and routine governed; when we are mindful, rules and routines may guide our behavior rather than predetermine it (Langer, 2000). With these contrasts, we can imagine a continuum that defines different degrees of mindfulness. The degree of mindfulness depends on the organization's or the individual's *situational awareness*. At the left side, being mindless (or less-mindful) encompass routine-driven behavior and reinforcement learning (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). At the right side, being mindful includes the ability to effectively carry out novel actions in flexible manners, and maintain high levels of attention (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). Nevertheless, we cannot have the felt experience of being mindless; that would require mindfulness (Langer, 2000). Therefore, most people consider themselves as being mindful. When we believe we know something well, we tend to view it mindlessly (Langer, 2000). In other words, direct quotations from Odd's sporting unit cannot prove mindfulness. At best, these are anecdotal indications. To state awareness to development is easy. To have a detailed explanation for how to identify areas in which can be improved is much more complicated. This defines the degree of mindfulness.

Based on studies on high reliability organizations (HROs), Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2008) deduce the theory of mindful organizations. These are characterized by rich awareness of discriminatory detail, and emphasize socialization of individuals into a culture that promotes critical reflection. Critical reflection may be essential for fine-tuning training (Sandbakk & Tønnesen, 2012). This includes looking back upon experiences by engaging in comparisons, considering alternatives, seeing things from various perspectives, and drawing inferences (Jordan, Messner & Becker, 2009). This process generates data for interpretation (Weick, 1995).

Nevertheless, neither generating a knowledge foundation nor engaging in critical reflection is sufficient in itself. The learning outcome of interpretation and evaluation is decisive. In order to promote reliable learning, one is dependent on continuous refinement and development of a richer action repertoire which increases the capacity to better adjust actions to the situation at hand (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015). This implies a nuanced understanding of the present circumstances, eagerness and ability to generate new expectations for the future, as well as capability to identify new dimensions of the context to stay ahead of the development (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). This is essential in order to remain competitive in an ever-changing professional sports environment. Figure 7 illustrates the key mechanisms of reflection that promotes learning.

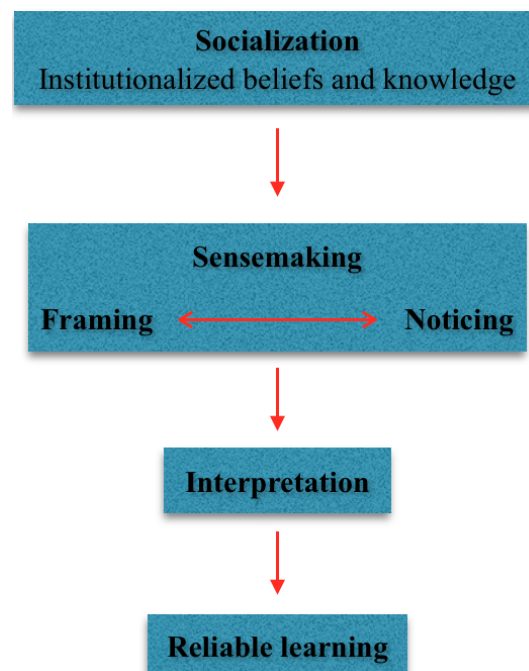


Figure 7: Key mechanisms of reflection (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015)

Mindful organizations hold detailed procedures that create clear expectations. In this way, it is possible to observe deviations in which can be utilized through learning and development (Andersen, 2009). This necessitate processes of collective mindfulness (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008), and learning from both success and failure (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003). However, the balance between emphasizing small wins or small flops is relatively fragile (Andersen, 2009). Weick (1984) documents that fear of errors provokes immobilization, and dysfunctional routines. Furthermore, as success generally encourages maintenance of status quo, organizational development might be hindered. However, if managed adequately, minor wins provide vitality and self-confidence (Weick, 1984), but also hold learning possibilities (Andersen, 2009). On the other hand, minor flops can generate organizational development, such as by avoiding them in the future (Sitkin, 1992).

3.4.3 Organizing for organizational learning

Continuous learning and development can be facilitated by cultivating characteristics of a mindful organization (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). This implies facilitating an adaptive organizational form, which might be a key to success in an increasingly complex environment, like professional sports (Bartlett, Gratton & Rolf, 2006). Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2008) present the following distinctive elements of such an arrangement: Preoccupation with failures, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to current operations, commitment to resilience, and underspecification of structures. In practice this include embracing failures and deviations in order to avoid them in the future; by observing and interpreting the whole picture so as to avoid a simplified version of what influenced the results; striving to find failures and deviations in familiar and routine situations; being resilient to unpredicted occurrences in order to implement necessary actions, as well as utilize the change that is absorbed; and to gain flexibility by enacting moments of organized anarchy, and a garbage can structure, as well as subordinate hierarchical rank to expertise and experience (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). The sporting unit is dependent on that the team of coaches organizes and facilitates for organizational learning. This includes sensegiving of the leadership philosophy towards the players and

supportive staff. Nevertheless, argued by Langer (2000), most teaching unintentionally fosters mindlessness. Facts are typically presented as closed packages, without attention to perspective. Accordingly, there is a paradox that sensegiving leadership might have unfortunate consequences for the organizational learning in Odd's sporting unit. In order to facilitate mindfulness, the sporting unit is dependent of mutual faith, and respect for professional competence and experience (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

As previously mentioned, the Norwegian top-level football environment is becoming increasingly more global, competitive, uncertain, turbulent, and complex. A mindful organization combines fragments of old routines with novel actions into a unique response to deal with a unique input (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). A key is to determine decisive factors of the process that cause the results (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003). This appear to be a prerequisite for generating a sustainable competitive advantage in professional sports (Andersen, 2009).

3.5 Summary

The literature review has elaborated theory on performance development. The distinction between performance development as process in contrast to result management was outlined initially. This case study focuses on the underlying processes that lead to the final outcomes. In this regard, results are regarded merely as insufficient indicators of performance. Performance development is determined as the nature and quality of the processes that influence the results.

In order to elaborate on this differentiation and to promote understanding of the research question, theory on organizational culture, performance culture, and organizational learning were then illuminated. The subsections that regarded performance culture illuminated essential characteristics of such a culture. As performance culture is commonly regarded as a distinctive form of organizational culture, the former concept was first clarified. Thereafter, the text clarified how to organize for performance culture through sociability and solidarity (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Particularly important elements included the duplex focus on process (mastering climate) and result (performance climate); continuous learning and development; organization and mobilization of human resources to achieve

innovation and flexible solutions; ambitious goals and high demands; constructive and dynamic interaction; and willingness to do whatever is necessary for achieving objectives.

The subsections that deal with organizational learning presented the importance of change and adaptability in order to stay competitive in an ever-changing environment. The benefits and liabilities of success and failure were introduced. This included fostering intelligent learning through the strategy of small losses (Sitkin, 1992). The concept of mindfulness was elaborated in terms of various degrees of situational awareness (Langer, 2000). Furthermore, the theory of mindful organizations (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008), and key mechanisms of reflection (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015) lay the foundation for how to organize for organizational learning.

In sum, the clarification of these theoretical streams has displayed an evident common thread in the theoretical framework. In order for an organization to stay competitive in an ever-changing environment, it must be concentrated on continuous learning and performance development. This literature review has demonstrated that it might be achieved by a) focusing on the underlying processes and not merely on results, b) organizing for a performance culture, c) learning through failure (the strategy of small losses), and d) cultivating characteristics of a mindful organization. The empirical findings will be analyzed in light of this literature review.

4.0 Methodology

This section clarifies how the study was conducted. The methods used to answer the research question are discussed. This includes the reasoning behind the chosen research design and the selected target sample, as well as the procedures of gathering, analyzing, and transcribing and coding the data. Furthermore, the quality of findings and conclusions are discussed. The section concludes with pointing out some ethical reflections.

4.1 Research design

In order to answer the research question and fulfill the objectives, research must be conducted. A natural starting point is that the research question determines the research design. The chosen research design should be effective in producing the wanted information within the determined constraints of the study. It might be considered as the overall strategy to obtain the information wanted, and what and how the information should be collected (Yin, 2013). Accordingly, it constitutes a blueprint that plans the procedure for conducting the scientific research. Choice of methodical approach is often based upon the ability to describe, explain, or explore a phenomenon (Yin, 1994). These alternatives constitute three different types of research design: Descriptive, causal, and exploratory, respectively. Descriptive research is adequate when the problem is structured and well understood (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2005). Causal (or explanatory) research is applicable when the objective is to measure the relation between cause and effect (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2005). Exploratory research is appropriate when exploring areas where there is little or no knowledge (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2005). Although the prominent success of Odd is well known, the underlying learning and performance development processes are not necessarily well understood by club leaders, players, spectators, competitors, and other stakeholders. Accordingly, the appropriate research design is an exploratory research design (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2005).

4.1.1 Case study

A case study encompasses an approach in which a phenomenon is subjected to intense investigation and analysis. The case might constitute «whatever bounded system is of interest» (Stake, 1983), e.g., an individual, group, organization, event, or action, existing in a specific time and place. In conjunction with this, the related context is of great importance. The boundaries are identified by the investigator, and continually kept in focus in order to determine what is and what is not of particular interest. Within this study, the case encompasses the performance development in Odd's sporting unit. The context includes their resources and practical conditions, organizational model, and leadership philosophy. The research takes form of a qualitative, exploratory, single case study. This research strategy and design were chosen to document the precise nature of a phenomenon not well understood.

There is no obvious conclusion as to what a case study is or should be (Andersen, 2013). Nevertheless, when implementing this kind of research, the richness of the phenomenon is investigated holistically over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2013), the underlying reason for choosing this approach is often a request to understand a complex, contemporary social phenomenon within a real-life context, when the researcher is questioning *how* or *why*, and the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. Odd's sporting unit is strategically chosen based on the research topic. With regards to results, they have improved both at the individual and the team level. Nevertheless, how and why are not documented.

4.1.2 Qualitative research

The choice between qualitative and quantitative research is not a question whether one or the other is intrinsically better, but what is most appropriate to the research problem (Silverman, 2010). Even though it might be advantageous to consider the pros and cons of using the various approaches, the choice of methodology should first and foremost be based on the research question. While quantitative research often is concerned with questions about how much, how many, or to what extent, qualitative research regards finding answers to questions which begin with why,

how, and in what way (Yin, 2013). Given the nature of the case, and the research question, a qualitative research study was chosen.

There are several characteristics determining why a qualitative approach appear most relevant when investigating Odd's performance development: A constructionist ontological orientation is required; qualitative data of words and experiences, in terms of the participants' own categories of meaning; the subject is approached by participant observation and semi-structured interviews; subjective interpretations and conclusions, as the researcher is intimately involved; a small sample; a naturalistic, real-life setting; and case-selection based on a unique quality. Furthermore, qualitative research is open-ended, dynamic, and flexible, which allow the researcher to change direction if necessary. These were essential concerns when choosing research method.

4.1.3 Data gathering

The data gathering occurred through data triangulation. This implies utilizing more methods to analyze the case, in order to search for converging findings from different sources. Furthermore, triangulation also facilitates for a fuller perspective on the situation being studied. This increases the construct validity (Yin, 2013). The data were primarily gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. With this approach, the objective was to produce knowledge that could illuminate the research question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also conducted some document analysis of various internal documents, archival records, long-term strategic plans, annual reports, as well as articles posted in different media. The reason was to magnify and improve the understanding of Odd's performance development, and increase the likelihood of intercept meanings and experiences that could not be quantified, or elsewhere not be acknowledged by the other procedures.

4.1.3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation involves observing and participating in the natural setting activities of the people under study (Kawulich, 2005). It constitutes the process of establishing rapport within a community, and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then removing

oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on, and be able to write detailed field notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Kawulich, 2005). Accordingly, it affords access to Odd's "backstage culture" (De Munck & Sobo, 1998). It allows for describing behaviors, intentions, situations, and events as understood by one's informants - participating in unscheduled events (De Munck & Sobo, 1998). It is regarded an adequate method in this case study as it provides the context for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Furthermore, as participant observation constitutes learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting (Kawulich, 2005), the process arranges for experiencing the rich, real-world context in Odd's sporting unit (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Accordingly, this method facilitates for investigating the research question. In sum, participant observation generates a holistic understanding of the performance development in Odd's sporting unit. This is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

In triangulation with interviews, it is also possible to check definitions of the interviewees' terms, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews. Accordingly, one might detect distortions or inaccuracies in descriptions (Kawulich, 2005). In this way, the method is facilitating involvement in sensitive activities (Bernard, 1994).

4.1.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

According to Gill et al. (2008), qualitative research interviewing is the adequate method when seeking to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters. Compared to purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, research interviews are believed to provide a richer understanding of social phenomena (Gill et al, 2008). This implies that they are striking deeper than a daily conversation in terms of structure and purpose. Accordingly, interviews are most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon, or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill et al, 2008). They are also particularly applicable for exploring

sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment (Boyce, 2006). Thus, establishing a perception of being a competent, trustworthy, and honorable person is of great importance in order to obtain the desired outcome (Andersen, 2013). Although the interview situation is a social setting, it must be characterized by professionalism.

There are three fundamental types of research interviews: Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Gill et al, 2008). When deciding which of them being most adequate for this study, pros and cons were weighed against each other. In structured interviews, a list of predetermined questions are asked. There is little or no variation, and restricted scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration. Accordingly, they are relatively quick and easy to administer, and may be of particular use if clarification of certain questions is required, or if there are likely to be literacy or numeracy problems with the respondents. However, by their very nature, they only allow for limited participant responses, and are therefore of little use if depth is required (Gill et al, 2008). As this is an essential objective in this project, structured interviews were considered inadequate. In contrast, unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas, and are implemented with little or no organizing (Gill et al, 2008). This imply a small amount of guidance on what to talk about and discuss. As this study seek to grasp a «bounded system of interest» (Stake, 1983), the boundaries should be continually kept in focus in order to determine what is and what is not of particular interest. Consequently, unstructured interviews were also doomed inadequate. With the advantages and shortcomings of these two methods in mind, the solution of conducting semi-structured interviews was evident. While this kind of interview consists of several key questions that help in defining the areas to be explored, it also facilitates for the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Gill et al, 2008). Accordingly, semi-structured interviewing promotes the flexibility requested to discover or elaborate information that is important to the members of Odd's sporting unit, but that might not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the researcher. Simultaneously, some guidance is possible.

4.2 Target Sample

Huberman & Miles (2002) indicate the importance of strategic selection of a sample in relation to the issues to be addressed. The sample should have some characteristics linked to the research question. Accordingly, the sample should be chosen based on some criteria that secure their contribution to the subject. In this case, the selection was based on an analytical rationale, determined in a feature analysis of aptness and qualification. Thus, the informants included might be termed *key informants*. According to Andersen (2013), key informants are persons that are considered possessing a particular good overview, and insight to the research question. They are selected due to having plenty of resources within their domain, and as they are considered helpful in describing the social reality that constitutes the subject matter (Andersen, 2013). When selecting key informants, the following characteristics were emphasized: Considerable time as engaged in the club, and profound comprehension of daily operations, functions, and activities in the sporting unit. These occupational qualifications were presumed to be essential in order to obtain the relevant information, and to illuminate the research question (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2015). In this way, the probability of securing adequate and informative interviews and data was probably increased (Patton, 1990).

In order to obtain an overall impression, and thus enhance the possibility for answering the research questions sufficiently, the final sample of key informants constituted both players, trainers, and supporting staff. Within these three groupings, the individuals also represented different attributes, age, experience, and roles within the organization. As all the informants are part of a small club, and a particularly restricted community, their identities might be easily detectable if more specific descriptions are provided. Nevertheless, after consulting all the involved parties with this concern, it was reach an agreement on differentiating the informants by using a capital letter representing the different groupings, and a digit. Thus, when referring to the interviewees, they are recognized as P for player, and T for trainer or supporting staff, followed by a particular digit.

4.3 Interview guide

To ensure that the interviews would provide the information needed, it was essential to work thoroughly with the planning of the interviews in advance. Based on Boyce & Neale's (2006) guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews, the most relevant stakeholders were first identified. Thereafter, an interview protocol was prepared, and the interview guide was translated into "the local language of football". The formulation of an interview guide was initiated early in the research process. Nevertheless, it further developed in parallel with generating the theoretical framework. This evolution contributed to higher-quality questions, and had me better prepared for constructive and suitable follow-up questions during the interviews. Also, inquiring Pedersen (2013), who had implemented a similar study in Viking FK and Tromsø IL, about his preparations, experiences, and issues, further assisted my work. With Pedersen's consent on using his interview guide as a point of departure - accommodating it for my research question and subject matter - I had a relative reliable foundation for collecting the qualitative data of the interviewees' feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

As different roles within the club hierarchy imply various information and points of view, two interview guides were made: One for the players, and one for coaches and supportive staff. The questions were neither supposed to be leading nor closed ended, but dormant and open-ended. However, they were formulated to determine a framework in which relevant information could emerge. Accordingly, on the one hand; both parties had some references to act in accordance with, while on the other hand; the informants could to a certain degree govern the course of the interview. In order to facilitate a smooth-going interview situation, a stock of possible probes was prepared. Factual questions were asked before option questions. I also pre-tested the interview guides in a pilot study with both a football player and a coach representing other clubs. The reason was to improve the interview guide, as well as to practice in conducting the interviews before the actual data collection. Some changes were done to the interview guides after this pilot study. Some questions were disposed as they provided equivalent responses, and the sequence of questions was adjusted to improve the flow. The final interview guides are displayed in appendix 2 and 3.

The pilot study was conducted in early January 2016. This gave me some time to reflect on my experiences, and make the appropriate adjustments to the interview guide. The main proportion of interviews was implemented during the training camp at La Manga between January 18-29. This was considered practical for both parties. Furthermore, with respect to the subject matter, it was regarded expedient to conduct the data gathering in this particular part of the season. A training camp represents an adequate arena for in-depth investigation. It is an excellent opportunity to follow Odd in a decisive preparation period. Information and knowledge gathered from this period could also constitute an important frame of reference for comparing different periods of their campaign.

With consent from the interviewees, the interviews were recorded. This is considered a great advantage for several reasons. First, the implementation became more pleasant and smooth-going. I could concentrate on being in the present, and adding the appropriate follow-up questions. Second, I was able to check for nonverbal expressions of feelings. These might provide vital information, and ensure significant meanings (Hinde, 1972). Third, all the information was stored on my computer. Accordingly, I was able to conduct literal transcription. This allowed me to integrate direct quotes in the text. Furthermore, I could re-listen to the interviews as much as perceived necessary to reach clarity. This facilitated the subsequent analysis.

4.4 Analysis of data

Data analysis can be defined as a systematic structuring of data, so that any patterns, themes, contrasts, comparisons, clustering, and structures emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, the empirical data was interpreted, and thereafter distinguished and sorted, named, categorized, and finally logically connected (Boeije, 2010). The transcribing and coding are described in the next subsection (4.5).

In interview studies, the sample size is often justified by interviewing participants until reaching “data saturation” (Francis et al, 2010). According to Glaser & Strauss (1967), this regards to the point in data selection when no new additional data are found that develop aspects of a conceptual category. However, there is no agreed method of establishing this ideal (Francis et al, 2010). Thus,

recruitment ceased as I felt the main concepts started to show redundancy along the various stories. Some informal conversations were conducted to finally determine that data saturation was reached. Fifteen interviews were conducted; seven with coaches and supporting staff, and eight with players.

The main analytic techniques utilized include time-series analysis, and pattern matching. The former implies inquiring *how* and *why* questions about relationships and changes of events over time. This is done in order to identify theoretically proposed sequences of an event that are expected to lead to a certain outcome (Yin, 2013). The latter technique implies comparing empirically based patterns with predicted one(s). This also includes searching for rival explanations. The reasoning behind choosing this procedure was initially to approach the case with an open mind, devoid of any prior assumptions, and then to compare empirically based patterns with the theoretical framework, and search for contradictory explanations.

Reasonably, with regards to the methods of data gathering, the qualitative data analysis started already during the data collection phase. As previously noted, data from participant observation and semi-structured interviews represent the primary sources. In addition, several informal conversations and some document analysis constitute secondary sources. These are supposed to generate deeper understanding, and a wider perspective on the case. I endeavored making accurate observation field notes, by not imposing preconceived categories, but allow them to emerge from Odd's community. As initially planned, I included exact quotes when possible, noted non-verbal cues, used pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, and provided descriptions without inferring meaning. I also included some photos of the various settings: Player meetings, training preparations and trainings, match preparations and matches, match meetings, video and analysis meetings, a GPS meeting, a nutrition guidance meeting, and a referee meeting. These photos helped me recall the situational circumstances, and contextualize the data.

During the semi-structured interviews, I automatically started creating a picture of what was of importance, and central to the issue. Reasonably, this led to some instinctive follow-up questions. However, I also focused on not being too influenced by the immediate apprehension. The actual analysis mainly began after transcribing the recorded interviews. However, the problem with written

transcripts is that some important non-verbal elements of a conversation might be ignored. Laughter, tone of voice, or gestures may also give added meaning to the spoken word (Lacey & Luff, 2009). Accordingly, I went through the recordings several times to ensure that the initial experience represented the final transcription. However, argued by Clayman & Gill (2004), a transcript should not be a substitute for the recording, but rather an essential analytical tool to be used along with the recording. My findings are described in the next section.

4.5 Transcribing and coding

As with all qualitative research, the findings always represent an interpretation of the empirical data. As previously mentioned, data are distinguished and sorted, named, categorized, and finally logically connected (Boeije, 2010). The first phase of this process is coding, in which simple means labelling (Wahyuni, 2012), or reducing a large amount of data into smaller segments. Accordingly, a code is a label that depicts the core topic of a segment (Boeije, 2010). There is no correct or incorrect way of implementing coding. Nevertheless, as applied in the grounded research approach, coding is usually undertaken on three levels: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Boeije, 2010). Open coding implies repeatedly reading the data, and coding as much as possible into different themes and concepts found in the data (Wahyuni, 2012). Axial coding involves regrouping these pieces of data into categories based on their relevant content. In this phase, the objective is to move from relatively literal codes, as in open coding, to conceptual codes. Finally, selective coding implies creating logical connections between the core categories in order to make sense of what has actually been happening in the observed practices (Boeije, 2012).

In this study, themes and concepts were constructed based on both the informants' statements, and reasonable subjects in accordance with the research question. Citations and other pieces of data were then grouped into suitable categories. Finally, findings from the core categories were summed up, and placed into subcategories. These are considered as key categories with respect to the research question. In order to reveal logical connections, these subcategories were then transformed into a matrix. Table 1 illustrates an example of this coding.

Kategori	T1	T2	T3	T4	T7	P1	P7
Små detaljer	Det er alltid ting vi kan bli bedre på: Detaljer. Men vi er nok på et så høyt nivå - uten å skryte - at det ikke handler om å endre, men det handler om å forbedre litt; finne små områder der vi kan gjøre ting bedre.	Vi er veldig detaljfokuser; det skal ikke slurves med noe. Det viktigste er at vi er kunnskaps-tørste; ekstremt opptatt av kunnskap og detaljer som kan gjøre oss bedre.	Vi leter hele tiden etter det neste steget; så isteden for å fokusere på 100 ting, så blir det veldig spisset hva vi holder på med. Vi er opptatt av detaljene som kan gi utvikling og skape kultur rundt det. De detaljene for å få helheten til fungere, de er vi dyrisk opptatt av: Alle sånne småting man kan gjøre noe med, men som ikke koster penger, og som gjør oss sharpere og mer forberedt - større sjanse for å gjøre det bedre - de detaljene er vi opptatt av.	Det handler om å søke etter hva som skjer neste gang. Jeg tenker hele tiden hva kan vi gjøre litt ekstra for å ta neste steg, så vi hele tiden ligger i forkant - ellers blir vi tatt igjen på direkten.	Det skal ikke være noen slinger i valsen. Det jobbes knallhardt i trenerteamet med detaljer for at laget skal bli bedre. Selv har jeg blitt mer oppmerksom på detaljene, og vet mer om hva kravene er.	Trenerne er tydelig på detaljer; det er ting man hele tiden får påminnelse på.	De er veldig detaljorienterte - spesielt hovedtreneren. Det er hele tiden sånne småting, som at vi har Smartfish og ikke YT (ulike resitusjons-drikker), selv om vi kunne fått YT gratis.

Table 1: An example of transcribing and coding of data⁵

4.6 Quality of findings and conclusions

The rigour of qualitative research has been subject to continuous discussion in the literature (Boeije, 2010). While the quantitative tradition believes that research should rely heavily on reliability and validity to ensure its replicability and generalizability, qualitative research has been less concerned with the traditional application of these measures (Wahyuni, 2012). Guba & Lincoln (1989) propose that dependability (parallels reliability), creditability (parallels internal validity), transferability (resembles external validity), and conformability (resembles objectivity) are more appropriate terms for judging trustworthiness in qualitative research. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), the goal in qualitative

⁵ This coding example is presented in the informants' original language (Norwegian) in order to illustrate the genuine data material. It was considered too comprehensive a process to translate all the data into English. Nevertheless, exemplifying quotes are translated.

research is to be as objective as possible. This implies that the research should be valid, and reliable. Given a common criticism that qualitative results are anecdotal, it is especially important to demonstrate that the qualitative data analysis is rigorous (Wahyuni, 2012). The following subsections illuminate validity, reliability, and generalizability, respectively.

4.6.1 Validity

Validity regards the extent to which the tests give true and correct answers. It represents the strengths of the answers. Accordingly, a valid argument is supposed to make sense and be reasoned, eligible, strong, and convincing.⁶ In social science, validity concerns whether a method is suitable to investigate what it is supposed to measure properly (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As previously indicated, utilizing a combination of participation observation and in-depth interviews is considered well suited for the purpose of this study. As it facilitates a fuller perspective on the situation being studied, it also increases the construct validity (Yin, 2013).

Nevertheless, validity is not exclusively about the research methods that are implemented. Validity also concerns the researchers' interpretations, moral integrity, and practical knowledge of conducting the relevant study (Smith, 1990). In other words, validity will also be judged by the extent to which an account seems to fairly and accurately represent the data collected (Wahyuni, 2012). Wahyuni (2012) argues that reflection is required in the presentation of your analysis, so that readers are convinced that your interpretations relate to the data gathered. This regards to a) the impact of your research design and approach to analysis on the results you present, b) the consistency of your findings (for example has the analysis been undertaken by more than one researcher; often referred to as inter-rater reliability), c) the extent to which you represent all relevant views (for example checking for 'negative' or deviant cases to test your interpretations), and d) adequate and systematic use of original data (for example using quotations, and not all from the same person) (Wahyuni, 2012). I recognize that the research design and methods facilitate subjective interpretation, and that

⁶ <http://www.wikihow.com/Convince-Anyone-of-Anything>

the analysis has been undertaken by one researcher mainly. Nevertheless, with continuous feedback, and concrete and convenient tips and advice from my supervisor, I assume this study represent the data collected fairly and accurately. Furthermore, the study presents a great variety of perspectives in informants, and includes a great deal of original data in a systematic way.

Argued by DeWalt & DeWalt (2002), if conducted adequately, participant observation increases the validity of the study. This statement holds even stronger when the method is combined with the use of additional strategies, such as interviewing and document analysis, or in triangulations with other more quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires (Kawulich, 2005). In this study, various methods were utilized. Accordingly, the incidence of "reactivity", or people acting in a certain way when they are aware of being observed, might have been reduced (Bernard, 1994). By conducting this type of field work, I sought to gain entry into Odd's community. Based on Kawulich's (2005) manual, I selected gatekeepers and key informants, participated in as many different activities allowed, clarified my findings through member checks, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations, and kept organized, structured field notes to facilitate the development of a narrative that would explain various cultural aspects to the reader.

4.6.2 Reliability

Reliability implies that the method should be proven reproducible and consistent. If the results are identical or equivalent to other research, the test has high reliability. Wahyuni (2012) emphasizes the importance of a) describing the approach to and procedures for data analysis, b) justifying why these are appropriate within the context of your study, c) clearly documenting the process of generating themes, concepts, or theories from the data audit trail, and d) referring to external evidence, including previous qualitative and quantitative studies, to test the conclusions of your analysis appropriately. These criteria were followed in this research study.

Reasonably, one should be focused on minimizing sources of error that might negatively influence the faith in the results. Nevertheless, being too obsessed with the reliability might in fact have negative influence on the creative

thinking and variation in the methods, and thus weaken the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Nevertheless, researchers who are aware of their biases when going into an experiment, and who make efforts to correct these biases, may avoid some (Hammer, du Prel, & Blettner, 2009). Furthermore, when researchers do not have a financial investment in a particular outcome they are also less likely to be biased.⁷ In addition, one might argue that the triangulation of both participant observation and semi-structured interviews might decrease this bias, as you collect a number of (more or less) independent measurements. This triangulation might also enhance reliability because the research is conducted at different places, with different methods, a sufficient number of informants, and under various surroundings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In order to prevent negative influence on reliability, I did also put effort in both preparing for and implementing the participant observation, and in-depth interviews. I endeavored making systematic and accurate observation field notes. This implied not imposing preconceived categories from the theoretical perspective, but allowing them to emerge from the community under study (Kawulich, 2005). Furthermore, my field notes encompass exact quotes when possible, use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, and provide descriptions without inferring meaning. According to Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte (1999), these are attributes of good field notes.

Furthermore, the interview guide was formulated to avoid a leading subtext undertone. This implied different themes with relatively open questions, and some prepared follow-up questions of more concrete character. This was done in order to generate free initial explanations and statements, where I also had the opportunity to approach more specific affairs if applicable, or necessary. The transcribing was done with high accuracy. I conducted literal writing, even when there were elements of highly informal character, in-orderly sentence structure, and swearwords. Apparently, this helped in managing the difficulties with summarizing the subject's experiences, and generating systematic reporting of all evidence. A potential issue in this regard concerned language barriers. Nevertheless, as I am familiar with both the "football glossary"⁸ in general, and

⁷ <http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/observer-bias>

⁸ <http://www.football-bible.com/soccer-glossary.html>

the community and jargon at Odd, this did not represent a factor for exclusion. In contrast, as they were aware of my background, they could make use of their everyday words and phrases, and express themselves as usual.

4.6.3 Generalizability

Generalizability refers to the extent to which findings can be generalized or extended to other surroundings and settings. It implies being manifest in a different occasion. A common concern about case studies is that they provide little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2009). This is due to the common tendency of restricted samples. Yin (2009) argues that case studies are generalizable to theoretical proposition, and not to populations, or universes. In this sense, the case study does not represent a "sample". When conducting a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize *theories* (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate *frequencies* (statistical generalization) (Yin, 2009). This reasoning also applies to this study. Statistical generalization to other clubs and organizations is not considered a vital element. Nevertheless, one might argue that the findings constitute an analytical character. This particular study provides an overview of both advantageous and disadvantageous practice in a top level football club, which can be investigated and utilized for different purposes. Internally, this study can be utilized as a documentation of what actually works, as well as a basis for further learning, development, and improvement. In addition, other clubs and organizations that are practicing under similar conditions can make use of the findings and conclusions as a frame of reference. This might be utilized to discover shortcomings or defects in their own practice, as well as an example of how to pursue and practice performance development.

4.7 Ethical reflections

As qualitative research interferes with people's private sphere, and entails the power to explore human existence in great detail, it is saturated with ethical issues (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Thus, Edwards & Skinner (2010) argue that the researcher needs to consider and act upon ethical responsibilities and contemplations throughout the project. This is decisive even beyond the data collection phase, into analysis, writing up, and publication (Edwards & Skinner,

2010). Accordingly, some ethical considerations were taken into account throughout this research study.

Ethical issues in qualitative research particularly arise because of the complexities associated with investigating human private lives, and display these descriptions in the public arena (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). In general, there are four main principles of researcher's code of conduct: Informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the researcher's role (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). These principles should be kept in mind when conducting research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Accordingly, they were continually addressed and reflected upon throughout the study. These four principles, and how they were acted upon, will be illuminated in the following paragraphs.

Informed consent refers to the importance of providing the participants sufficient information about the purpose of the study, the main features of the design, as well as the potential pros and cons of participating in the research project (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). This must be done before making any progress with the implementation of the study. Furthermore, informed consent ensures the voluntariness of participating, and informs the participants of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). My informants were given an information letter, and a declaration of informed consent at the introduction of the project (see Appendix 1). Furthermore, before the in-depth interviews, they were also orally made aware of the content of the information letter. Accordingly, this study fulfilled all the above mentioned criteria concerning informed consent.

Confidentiality implies the right to remain anonymous, in terms of avoiding that private data can lead to identification of participants. This principle raises a potential dilemma: The researcher might in fact be forced to rule out some valuable information, in which is directly in conflict with the fundamental protection. The sensitivity of this study might be discussed. Direct reporting of internal performance development might not touch tender spots of the individuals' lives. However, some elements are reasonably more sensitive to the involved parties. Some obvious examples are the internal faith among the persons that constitutes the team of coaches, the players' faith in the top leader and the professional competence of the team of coaches, personal ambitions, individual

stories of sporting adversity and/or success, experiences of internal competition, physical tests, and measurement of body fat percentage. Furthermore, Odd is operating within a sector that is increasingly exposed to media attention.⁹ There are several well-known individuals that might be identified based on their appearance and attendance in various media channels. With these aspects in mind, I wanted to ensure the informants about the voluntariness of participation, that they could trust me as researcher, and that their anonymity was secured in the paper. In this way, I also hoped for the informants to speak and act freely, in terms of not approaching the study as I was a journalist or similar, and only tell and do "the right things."

There are both potential pros and cons of taking part in a study. The goal should always be to have the lowest negative consequences as possible (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). In this study, there were not considered any significant cons of participating. During periods of participant observation, I remained more or less in the background, and initiated some informal conversations at presumed proper points of time. With respect to the in-depth interviews, time and strength were regarded as the main inconveniences. In order to accommodate for this, the interviews were conducted in the informants' respective apartments, under informal surroundings, and after training sessions. The value of their contribution was made clear. My appreciation was only proven by thankfulness, and the informants did not receive any incentives for participating. Nevertheless, they did not express holding any grudge of taking part in the study.

The role of the researcher concerns his or her integrity, and appearance as a person. These are vital elements with respect to the scientific knowledge, and the ethical decisions made in qualitative research. In this regard, Kvale & Brinkmann (2008) emphasize the importance of the researcher's knowledge, experience, honesty, and fairness. Although the study subjects have a different workday than me, I do have great knowledge and experience from their everyday actions and procedures, what their everyday training constitute, how they eat, sleep, recover and so forth. Furthermore, with regards to fairness and honesty,

⁹ <http://trenerforeningen.no/default.asp?layout=article&id=354>

their quotations are pure, literal transcripts of what were stated during the interviews. Their meanings are contextualized, and the informants' identities are anonymized.

5.0 Findings and analysis

This section presents the findings and analysis. As previously mentioned, the analysis is conducted in relation to the literature review. Accordingly, the empirical findings are to be interpreted in light of theory that regards continuous performance development. Observations and literal transcripts of quotes are integrated in the text. These are based on structured field notes of my exposure to and involvement in the day-to-day and routine activities of Odd's sporting unit. Key elements of Odd's player development, team organizing, and sensegiving leadership are documented. A recurring theme in their performance development is simplicity and detail-focus. As will be pointed out, Odd is not very different from the teams they outperform with respect to types of activities that characterize development, and game preparation. The study suggests that the difference lies mainly in the way the coaches, supportive staff, and players pursue *their* approach with consistency and great care about the minor and mundane details. They do not simply do more of the same exercises, preparations, and evaluations. Like other teams, their ambition is always to improve the way they do it. The challenge is to achieve quality in every details in a way that strengthen continuous development. This regards a) emphasizing the underlying processes that lead to results (process focus), b) pursuing the minor and mundane details, c) an evident and pervaded performance culture, and d) several signs of organizational learning. Some characteristics that are considered to be in conflict with the principles of continuous performance development are also presented. These are followed by practical suggestions for future initiatives. The section concludes with a summary of the findings.

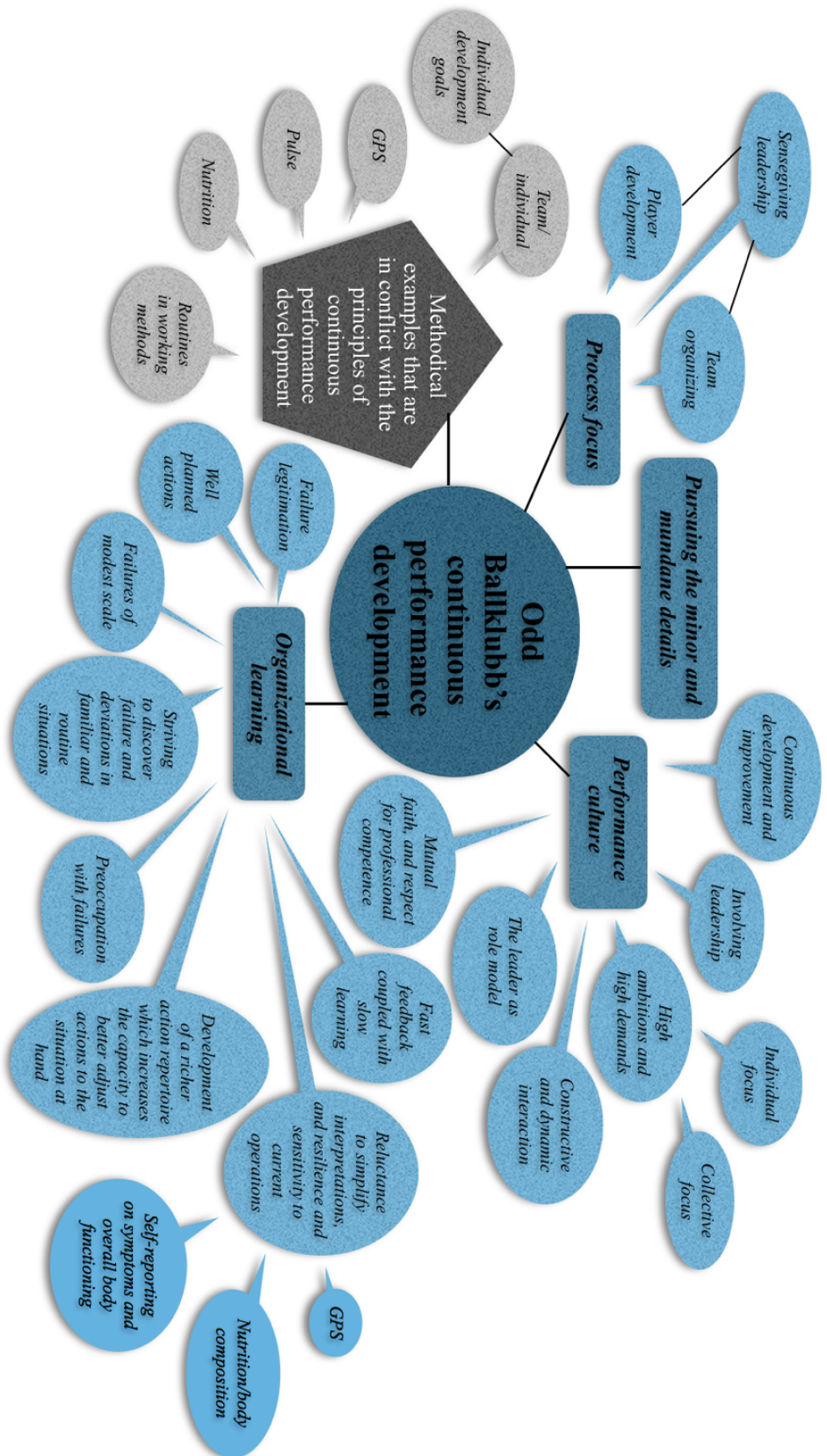


Figure 8: Illustration of the main characteristics of Odd Ballklubb's continuous performance development

5.1 Process focus

As previously indicated, a common method to achieve a final result is to divide the overall objective into several subgoals. Although this method obviously facilitates the experience of small wins during the process, which can boost motivation, eager, and self-confidence (Weick, 1984), arranging for several subgoals does not imply a process focus in itself. In contrast, it only involves a fragmented result focus. Odd's sporting unit recognizes that focusing on results is important. However, being exclusively oriented towards results is considered heavily disadvantageous. It is important also to recognize what kind of development and actions that are necessary to reach those goals; the actual means. This implies a *process focus*. Internally, this is referred to as being development-oriented (in accordance with the leadership philosophy).

Strategies for player development are initially based on their predictions of the future requirements of the sport. This forecasting lays the foundation for the individual player's development goals. In order to make the necessary individual initiatives, GPS-statistics, regular conversations, daily self-reporting schemas, and the match schedule are taken into account (how these initiatives are utilized to generate a bigger picture, and to avoid a simplified version of what influenced the results, will be illuminated in section 5.4.4). Also, mapping both strengths and weaknesses is vital in this regard. The everyday player development is then regularly adjusted on the basis of this data. My interpretation is that Odd manages to keep focus on the underlying processes in their player development. Great facilities are utilized in a reasonable and conscious way. This is acknowledged by the players: *«It is really facilitated for individual player development. I have every opportunity to train as much as I want, and have access to facilities (...) I see no reason why I should not be good at Odd (P6). «It is somehow of up to you only to utilize it the best. The door is always open at the coaches' office, so it is very facilitated» (P8).* Nevertheless, as will be documented in section 5.5, the degree of mindfulness appears to variate between and within the various main processes of Odd's performance development, as well as among the coaches, supporting staff, and players. This can have consequences for their learning outcome, and performance development.

The team organizing is based on the elements considered vital in order to achieve their overall goals. Odd engages in comprehensive preparation and practice on such elements as a high line of confrontation, and regaining possession. *«The ingrained system makes it easier to cope with work tasks (...) The head coach is clear in his style of play. It is more rigid, but also very easy to know what to do»* (P1). The team of coaches underlines the importance of learning and performance development in relations and interaction. Focus is on mastering their style of play as best as possible during both training/preparation and competition. This testifies a process approach. In this way, they manage to practice a balanced focus on mastery and performance through systematic planning and implementation. In my perspective, Odd's team organizing is vital to their recent success. The team organizing is described decently well by right-back Espen Ruud: *«It is not important who poses the remaining roles at my side. There is no point in highlighting any single player when the system is the key - a system that is very ingrained in everyone in the team (...) With this functioning, you can almost pass the ball blindly»*.¹⁰

The consistency in player development and team organizing is facilitated through sensegiving leadership. Apparently, the team of coaches manages to make adjustments and include new initiatives and actions to further develop and improve (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009). This helps in balancing the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). This study suggests that the head coach's leadership philosophy has positive influence on both player development and team organizing. Apparently, systematic process focus is decisive.

However, in the heat of the moment, passionate engagement causes obvious deviations from an exclusive process focus. The team of coaches reactions and feedback sometimes tip over from constructive feedback to exclusively yelling. *«In particularly during matches, they can be unreasonable, and say things they would not have done otherwise, because of stress and pressure and such* (P1). Nevertheless, in my perspective, such passion is vital in order to engage in top level sports, and to commit to continuous performance development

¹⁰ <http://www.varden.no/sport/ingen-forsvarer-er-mer-malfarlig-enn-espen-1.1469889>

of a top level football club. In sports, success is defined as superiority of performance during competition. Thus, in some clubs, the team of coaches are in fact dependent on winning trophies on a regularly basis to keep their business running. This regards the results of the accomplishment, and not the execution in itself. In contrast, I consider Odd as a club that in general maintains attention to the underlying processes. The premise of a small club with restricted resources and economic strength makes Odd an obvious interesting case. In time of writing, their business philosophy is not too centered on the obvious and manifest results and outcomes. The team of coaches is working on the basis of a long-term performance development perspective. This does not necessarily imply continuous success. Focus is on constant improvement of the process that leads to the outcome, and not merely on trophies in themselves: *«At Odd, I can work with development, in which I consider more enjoyable than buying (...) If cup finals, and medals, and money were the only focus, I should have worked at another club than Odd»* (T1). *«If we are further developing what is already present - and make sure that everyone become a little better - at last it will bring results as well. That implies focus on performance rather than result. In short term, maybe it will result in first, second, or fifth place. As long as we stick to our philosophy - it might cost six points and we will have a fifth place the year after winning medals - but that is what bring us up again where we belong the year after. We must be willing to take a downturn in order to get better in the long run. Obviously, it is not easy. However, we have support from the whole club»* (T3). They team of coaches engages in comprehensive sensegiving of their performance development practice through process focused player development, and team organizing. This documents balance between a "performance climate" and a "mastery climate" (see figure 3).

5.2 Pursuing the minor and mundane details

You do not need a huge sound to leave your mark. Simplicity might actually be successful. Apparently, the simple doing of certain small tasks generates huge results (Chambliss, 1989). During my investigation, I realized that Odd's everyday initiatives do not trigger overwhelming excitement. Nevertheless, I was genuinely impressed by the team of coaches' approach and consistency to care

greatly about the minor and mundane details, and how they engaged the group of players in comprehensive sensegiving of their testament. Previously, there were major differences in how the members considered the importance of some minor and mundane details. Some of them were determined insignificant, or somewhat unimportant in the big picture. At present, with the head coach in the driver's seat, the sporting unit is committed to seek improvement in all elements, processes, activities, and members. It is clarified that the details constitute vital parts of Odd's performance development. Their obsession with the minor and mundane details makes simplicity into a religion. «*We are bestial engaged in those minor details that make the functioning of the whole*» (T3). A prime example for optimizing the recovery process, is having extra cheese on the pizza crust in the dressing room after match. Other details regard to minute precise pre-match meal (three hours and 45 minutes before kick-off), type of recovery drinks (exclusively Smartfish, although they could have made large deals with other notable suppliers), transportation (e.g. private jet), preparation for training and recovery initiatives (e.g., the "prep"), new GPS-equipment, distinctive barometric pressure in the footballs, individual 24-hour athlete development, and characteristic team organization - all the details that might improve the chances of success. The sporting unit's initiatives are neither unmanageable nor terribly difficult. Nevertheless, with quality in the execution of every detail, their outcome can be significant and decisive. By pursuing the minor and mundane details, the sporting unit improves its performance development.

5.3 Performance culture in Odds Ballklubb

Odd is demonstrating several evident signs on pursuing the previously mentioned characteristics of a performance culture. This is mainly promoted by a head coach that is engaged in selling his leadership philosophy to his target audience: The players, and team of coaches. Furthermore, the team of coaches manages to balance the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). Accordingly, they are practicing in accordance with the ideal of a duplex focus on "performance climate" and "mastery climate" (Figure 3). Based on what I have witnessed during my investigation, the following paragraphs illuminate how and why Odd

practices in accordance with the principles of a performance culture. To clarify, this includes a) continuous development and improvement, b) involving leadership, c) high ambitions and high demands, d) individual focus, e) collective focus, f) constructive and dynamic interaction, g) the leader as a role model, and h) mutual faith, and respect for professional competence.

5.3.1 Continuous development and improvement

The former elite athlete Bjørn Dæhlie once declared that: *«World champion is something you have been, or can become. It is not what you are at present»*. This implies that you will have to improve continuously even when performing great. It is vital in order to recreate success. During my investigation, I was regularly reminded that this focus on improvement is ingrained in the mentality of Odd's sporting unit. As previously indicated, the members are always seeking improvement at certain details. This was emphasized by each and all informants in the interviews. Although recognizing quality in their working methods, the team acknowledges that they can always do better: *«We know that our working methods are among the best in Norway. Also, during our study tours in Europe, we see that our practice is great. Nevertheless, there are always things we can do better; details. At any time, everyone in the team of coaches can develop a bit, and find new impulses which again can have influence on the players. This involves effort to always keep oneself posted at how the football is developing in five years, ten years, and so on, and trying to be in front»* (T1). *«What we did yesterday is not got enough tomorrow»* (T5). As indicated by their innovative and flexible initiatives, these reasonings are also brought into practice (this will be further elaborated in section 5.4.4). Furthermore, the sporting unit is challenging the aspiration levels regularly. Over the last two seasons, their season goal is enhanced from a top-six and a top-five position respectively, to a historical medal goal in the current campaign. This is determined as a natural consequence of their progress and improvement. In this way, the goals remain neither too easy, nor too challenging. Rather, there is a strong theoretical and empirical basis for concluding that such "modestly challenging" goals foster high performance (Sitkin, 1992). This due to increased effort and attention, as well as to increased learning from experience (Locke & Latham, 1990).

5.3.2 Involving leadership

An engaging style of leadership involves reaching out to employees, and understand their concerns and working situations. Involving leadership is a process that can function both ways, in terms of actively involving in others' affairs, as well as having others involved in oneself (Fische, 1998). The head coach is the unquestionable leader and chief executive in the sporting unit. He has also got the main responsibility for the results. Nevertheless, there is a broad understanding that the development and final results are dependent on all the individuals within the sporting unit - from the team of coaches, to supporting staff, and players. The head coach is demonstrating an involving style of leadership. The players, coaches, and supporting staff are engaged in participation, professional discussion, and cooperation. They are also somewhat involved in decision processes. *«It is important to find your role, operate as sparring partner, and ensure that the head coach becomes great»* (T3). *«One of the team's strengths is that we have great knowledge and constitute complementary abilities so that we complement each other. We have found our positions in the system, and we have the opportunity to use our knowledge and competence»* (T2). These elements enhance their understanding of particular roles and contribution. According to Stensbøl (2012), such inclusion generates security.

Furthermore, the team of coaches is focusing on the players' everyday functioning, and balance between different areas in life. In this way, they also indicate concern for personal affairs. *«It is important to get close to the players; to know them both with respect to how things are at home - with wife and children - and the everyday body functioning. The whole is extremely important. We want "fingerspitsgefühlen" on how much the players can train, when they need a day off, and try to facilitate for optimal training for each player, so that everyone develops - and don't get into a comfort zone it is easy to be caught in»* (T5). This quote indicates a central value in Norwegian elite sports. Nevertheless, how it is integrated in Odd's performance development appears somewhat distinctive. Although having mainly a professional relationship, the players express great satisfaction with the team of coaches. They are sincerely engaged in the players, and understand their concerns. *«The team of coaches means a lot. The head coach has given me confidence and a lot of feedback (...) not so much as a footballer but*

as a human being, with regards to relaxation, girlfriend, family and so forth» (P8). In my perspective, such active and involving attitudes towards the group of players appear decisive to obtain intimate knowledge of each person's strong and weak sides, and lay the foundation for basic trust in work-related relationships at Odd's sporting unit.

5.3.3 High ambitions and high demands

A performance culture imposes relatively strict requirements to both subordinates and leaders. It is decisive to settle on offensive goals (Stensbøl, 2012). The clarification of expectations should also be evident. Furthermore, one must be willing and able to face the consequences of the ambitions with a positive and patient attitude (Stensbøl, 2012). These characteristics are recognizable at Odd.

Odd has ambitions of contending in the top of Norwegian football, as well as participating in European cups. Furthermore, the club is striving to develop players that reach the Norwegian national team, and who take the step out into European clubs. These ambitions necessitate high demands. Therefore, it is stated that Odd's sporting unit shall be characterized by positive people who have offensive mindsets and high ambitions. They must also demonstrate willingness to do whatever is necessary for achieving the objectives. *«Players who state that they will not have bigger responsibilities than they can manage are too defensive: You shall prefer challenges. Offensive people are outstanding, but they must also face the consequences»* (T1). Therefore, Odd is working on making their cultural framework a constituent part of the 24-hour athlete. This implies professionalizing the everyday of the players. In terms of elite sports specific affairs, the coaches are making concrete demands with respect to hard work in training, always being development-oriented, recovering through enough sleep and rest, appropriate diet and nutrition and so forth. These elements are checked and followed up by GPS-statistics, daily report forms and urine tests, and regular measurements of body fat percentage. The demands attributed each and all are evident. These are communicated by stable values, norms, and rules of interaction. It is also clear what are the consequences for the individual's everyday training and life in general, and what initiatives and actions that should be implemented in order to achieve the objectives. *«The team of coaches is really clear in terms of how they*

want us to play, train, and in a sense, live. It is easy to act in accordance with their demands. You don't need to be insecure of what to do, and what is coming up» (P1). Based on the continuity and clearness in the philosophy, the players also express acceptance for the strategy and plan that are fronted. This clarity promotes a sense of ownership to the culture and the team. It also enhances the probability of reaching the ambitions (Stensbøl, 2012).

There is an evident internal justice both within the team of coaches, and in the group of players. They are applying an informal evaluation process, in which *«tremendously practiced eyes are evaluating themselves afterwards, but without ticking off any scheme»* (T3). Although not having a formal evaluation journal, the coaches are constantly discussing each others' areas of responsibility: *«We are tough, and have a great internal culture with respect to self-justice. We make high demands, and have our heels raised in order not to fall asleep»* (T1). This practice is recognized as one of the main reasons for why this particular team of coaches has been in charge for a significant period of time: *«I'm really impressed about the way they are working, and how they are keeping their heels raised by recognizing that what we did yesterday is not good enough today, or tomorrow. We always need to develop, and get better»* (P1).

With regards to the group of players, they make high demands, and are in general not afraid of stating their opinions and expectations. You reap praise if you are doing great, however, you are also getting yelled at if you are idling away from duties, or perform poorly. This clarity, and brutal openness in feedback, generate a deep understanding for what you are doing, what achievements those actions create, and maybe most importantly; how to promote them.

One might argue that Odd's ambitions satisfy the requirements of the SMART-goal approach. This theorem states that the goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and tentative. The ambitions of being among the top clubs in Norway every year, as well as participating in European cups, constitute specific goals, as these are exclusively result-oriented. As Ivar Hoff once stated: *«There is nothing as honest, correct, and ice-cold as a football table. It does not lie»*. Accordingly, these objectives are also easily measurable. However, in order to reach them, you are dependent on that everyone supports and assists the goals. This necessitate that the actors perceive them as realistic, and

attainable. Therefore, in every pre-season, the team agrees on a common goal concerning the final position in Tippeligaen. «*Although we got a bronze medal two years ago, and we knew we were capable of recreating that achievement, we agreed on settling on a top five-goal the forthcoming season*» (P1). «*Already the season we got the bronze, we knew we had a good team, and we knew we could do great, but we had never taken a medal before - so we probably felt that we could make it, however, we wouldn't anyway. Nevertheless, now we know that there is not a long way up, so it is easier to state it now*» (P6). These objectives are obviously also highly relevant for an ambitious club like Odd. Furthermore, season goals imply a tentative nature, as these are ending simultaneously with the last match of the year.

At this point, it is worth reminding that this study takes an organizational psychological perspective. From an economic perspective or structural perspective, the discussion would have been different. My investigation suggests alignment between Odd's high ambitions, and the willingness and ability to take the consequences. The ambitions of having players reaching the Norwegian national team, and take the step out into European clubs, are facilitated by process-focused player development, and sensegiving leadership. Their predictions of the future requirements of the sport provide guidelines for individual initiatives. The team of coaches raises the awareness of the importance of pursuing the minor and mundane details in everyday training. At group level, contending in the top of Norwegian football, as well as participating in European cups place constraints on solidarity, and team organizing. The team of coaches shows consistently engagement in culture development. Also, the evident internal justice creates somewhat an interdependent relationship between the members. Tensions and conflicts are welcomed, and Odd's culture supports constructive solutions. This contributes to further development of the organization. Apparently, the combination of dedication and competence in the sporting unit enhance the possibility of reaching their great ambitions. In sum, the head coach is settled on having a strong collective unit composed of several individualists that want to reach their personal goals without tottering. This is promoted by a leader that manage to concern for both player development, and team organizing. The two

following paragraphs illuminate in what way the high ambitions and high demands regards to the individuals and the collective, respectively.

5.3.3.1 Individual focus

An important characteristic of a performance culture is that everyone has individual goals (Andersen & Sæther, 2008; Stensbøl, 2012). This implies that the individuals are focusing on improving own performances. The leaders should be involved in these performances, and provide feedback and guidance. In this way, you are valued as individual (Stensbøl, 2012).

This reasoning is evident in the first principle of the head coach's leadership philosophy: *«The sporting unit shall be characterized by people having personal ambitions - not ambitions on behalf of others, such as winning the cup or taking a medal in TL, although that is great - but individual goals such as being the best player in Tippeligaen in one's position, representing the national team, lose a couple of kilos, or increase the number of high-intensity runs»*.

Accordingly, it is recognized that individuals are generating unique performances. Nevertheless, to perform great individually is not necessarily in contradiction with taking responsibility for the whole. *«There is a balance between ambitions on behalf of oneself versus egoism»* (T3). Their conception clarifies that it is not necessarily contradictory to develop and prepare for the Norwegian national team, and become really good in the collective Odd. *«Simultaneously, it is named a match - in which you are supposed to beat a competitor - and if you only have nice guys, it is not for certain that you succeed»* (T3).

Although not formally stated or written down, the team of coaches hold both strict requirements and personal ambitions to grow and improve within their role. *«We are in general very searching for knowledge»* (T5). *«It is important to acknowledge that you can always become better: That's why we are having a study tour each year»* (T1). These tours are utilized to acquire important knowledge and input from prosperous and successful clubs such as Manchester United, Chelsea, Borussia Dortmund, Crystal Palace, Tottenham, Malmö, and Brentford. Thus, *«they are learning from the best»* (P1). That includes both physical, tactical, and technical elements. It also holds for general actions that facilitate more professional everyday routines; details that might be improved.

Nevertheless, as argued by Eliot (1920): «*Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different*». This is acknowledged by the team of coaches. They utilize these inputs as a foundation for new initiatives and actions. They do not copy the initiatives and knowledge completely, rather these are "stolen", and adjusted to Odd's context.

Furthermore, the team of coaches utilizes an external expert in football and sports psychology on a regular basis. This actor functions as a mental trainer that coaches the team of coaches. «*When the football is becoming that huge - with everything attached social media and so forth, we have chosen to train the team of coaches in order to get more knowledge on mental processes*» (T3). These sessions involve grasping particular cases, such as how to manage the level of tension before and during matches. Moreover, the head coach has followed the Norwegian national team closely during important national team gatherings. This was initiated in order to absorb new impulses, ask questions, and share information.

The individual focus is also evident among the players. Every player has determined some personal development goals. This is an essential factor in a good performance culture (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). These objectives are settled in player conversations, in conjunction with mapping both strengths and weaknesses. In order to remark their importance, these development goals are glued to the wall above the players' dressing room seatings.

5.3.3.2 *Collective focus*

Building culture takes time, however, it is quickly broken down if it is not maintained (Stensbøl, 2012). Odd is working on making their culture deal with the areas of focus: Hard work, and being development-oriented. «*We are engaged in the details that might provide development, and create culture around them*» (T3). When the ego become too big, and precedes in an undesired direction, it is nip in the bud. «*If the ego takes over, and the "I" become that big that the "we" is forgotten, you have a short life expectancy at Odd. We are depending on dynamic, and appreciating the whole. Building up the "we" creates culture*» (T3). Odd has been cynical and systematic in bringing in those players that fit the group, and the

philosophy. The club is engaged in inducing a system characterized by the head coach's professional football philosophy, as well as pursuing the "Odd brand" with strong local belonging. «*Obviously, we are engaged in thorough research whether the football player fits our system as type of player. However, we are also damned engaged in thorough research regarding what kind of personality the individual holds. They should fit our community*» (T3). «*"Bjellekuer" are weeded out, and we have become a more cohesive group*» (T7). The good chemistry and "dressing room culture" is acknowledged both internally by players, coaches, and supporting staff, as well as externally by media, incoming actors, and various competitors. During my episodic attendance in the dressing room, I definitely experienced Stensbøl's (2012) characteristic description of a strong inner order (non-verbally) telling that «we are performing together», «we are a team, not a group», and that «although having individual goals, we are responsible for the whole».

5.3.4 Constructive and dynamic interaction

Andersen & Sæther (2008) further emphasize the importance of constructive and dynamic interaction in a performance culture. This imply both willingness and ability to engage in active interplay. The team of coaches is facilitating this ideal in terms of a two-way dialog in the analysis sessions, and daily conversations. The group of players are asked for their personal opinions and experiences. For example, in order to avoid getting blinded by the "player load" statistics, the coaches are also seeking the players' actual experience. This also helps in adjusting the training, and everyday load.

Continuity and involvement are key elements in Odd's philosophy. This hold for both style of play, and staffing. Regardless of success or adversity, the sporting unit is always working in accordance with the same framework. «*We are looking at what we do, and what can be done better*» (T5). «*We have stood by what we believe in, and we have got the club and players engaged in this reasoning*» (T2). In order to prevent and avoid pulverization of responsibility, the head coach prefer a smaller team. This also ensures that there are not too many persons for the players to relate to, listen to, and get feedback from. Therefore, the team of coaches was strategically chosen from the very beginning. The very few

changes and extensions have been in accordance with the initial reasoning. Simultaneously, the head coach emphasizes the importance of having people with different backgrounds and perspective than himself: Different nature and character, player experience, and interdisciplinary background. Their competence, knowledge, and positive energy are perceived as essential constituent parts of the final product.

Furthermore, Andersen & Sæther (2008) indicate the importance of intimate knowledge of each person's strong and weak sides. It is part of the nature of top level football that these aspects become relatively evident in training situations, regardless of how hard you are trying to hide them. Accordingly, these are no secrets to the player group. However, how strengths and weaknesses are communicated within the team is not determined. The head coach practices brutal openness. Mistakes and deviations from desired behavior are brought into focus. Nevertheless, he is trying to practice systematic predominance of positive feedback above negative feedback, or constructive criticism, following the principle 6:2 distribution:

«I'm trying to focus mostly on what the players are good at, but it goes both ways. It is important to focus on what is done right, as it is important to reinforce it, in order to make it happen again. But it might be that I have to grasp some negatives or wrongs in order to correct. Then it is important how you choose to do this. I might be tough and hard, as can be experienced stressful, but it might also be right sometimes. On the other hand, if you are kicked in the ass over time, you are getting sore at last - and that's not right. I know I'm not sufficiently good at this, however, I know it is most important to provide positive feedback, and reinforce what they are good at.»

Professionally, it is obviously not a "kind climate". As previously indicated, the team of coaches imposes evident demands, and transparent clarifications of expectations. *«I think maybe other coaches were more patient with younger players than what I feel today's head coach is. He is much tougher - tougher than I think is wise. There may be reasons to be hard occasionally - with some players - but I do not think it is wise in all occasions. I request more*

customization in the feedback. Some need a kick in the ass, but I think they need more constructive direction than direction which becomes more like yelling, where you express that you are about to give them up, and make them feel stupid» (P1). Although indicating that some response sometimes can tip over from constructive feedback to exclusively yelling, the player group values the clarity and openness. *«I think it is okay in such a group of players. It is black and white; the coach tells you whether you are good or bad, and you don't need to wonder what he thinks of your performances. I think it's better to have a coach that is open than a coach that is reserved, so people are wondering all the time» (P6).* *«The first few years, I was also a little shocked that it is very tough feedback. Nothing is covered up. At the same time, there is something pleasant with not holding back anything; you are given honest and genuine feedback. Then of course, you should ignore the yelling part, and try to take the constructive out of it. It might be done better - more constructive - but it is also something you learn to cope with eventually» (P8).*

Apparently, Odd's sporting unit endeavors constructive interaction and feedback in practice. Stensbøl (2012) argues that such openness promotes dynamics. Brutal openness is acknowledged as the nature of the sport, and if not a great strength, it is neither a significant inconvenience. In this regard, the evident and integrated philosophy and mentality appear decisive. Continuity in requirements with respect to training and style of play facilitates separating case from person in evaluation processes. This study considers it an important element in order to utilize the experiences as a learning arena, and further develop and improve. In my perspective, Odd facilitates dynamic interaction by inquiring personal opinions and experiences. Nevertheless, in some occasions, the feedback preferably could be more constructive, rather than verbal abuse.

5.3.5 The leader as role model

It is widely acknowledged that leadership is a vital element to achieve performance culture within an organization (Kaas, Kaggstad & Kristiansen, 2007; Vik, 2007; Andersen & Sæther, 2008; Stensbøl, 2012). The process of building a culture starts at the top of the organization. The head coach recognizes the importance of his character and actions: *«If I were to choose a defensive*

strategy against the tough opponents away from home, I would not demonstrate being offensive myself, as well as having faith in them». It is acknowledged that the head coach starts by placing high demands on himself. In accordance with Andersen & Sæther's (2008) recommendations, he serves as a contributor to an operative and reflecting culture development. He is described as a practician and a perfectionist, who impose significant requirements to the minor details. As there is reciprocal respect for professional competence (will be further elaborated in section 5.3.6), and the whole sporting unit communicates faith in the top leader, his sensegiving leadership lead the way for the other coaches, supporting staff, and group of players. Apparently, his conscious and detail-focused performance development has distinct influence on the whole organization. Nevertheless, argued by Langer (2000), most teaching unintentionally fosters mindlessness. Facts are typically presented as closed pack ages, without attention to perspective. Accordingly, this sensegiving leadership might have unfortunate consequences for the organizational learning in the sporting unit. Nevertheless, as will be further elaborated in section 5.4.8, it is acknowledged that different thoughts and multiple perspectives have the potential to further develop the team. This indicate a state of situational awareness and mindfulness (Langer, 2000).

5.3.6 Mutual faith, and respect for professional competence

In order to promote a great performance culture, it is important that the individuals have mutual respect for professional competence and knowledge (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). This implies freedom of expression and openness, but even more importantly; that the expressions are taken seriously and being handled. In other words, it is essential to indicate mutual faith and respect in theory, as well as through practical actions and daily interaction. The following paragraphs present how this hold both within and between the various groupings of the sporting unit.

Players → coaches: The players confirm having respect for the team of coaches. They have great faith in their professional competence, and working methods. *«Their plans are deeply rooted professionally, as well as being based on experience. Thus, if we are getting at black ice, we know exactly what to do»* (P8). Furthermore, the team of coaches possesses complementary skills, so *«they*

complement each other in a pretty good way» (P6). «We will have faith as long as we are development-oriented: Always trying to be in leading edge» (T3). «The players are asking several questions, in which is often a good signal that they have faith in our knowledge» (T5).

Coaches → players: The team of coaches also confirm having respect for the professional competence and experience in the group of players. Even though being more direct and declarative towards new people with restricted knowledge of Odd's philosophy, the head coach is very much inquiring towards long-term members of the squad: *«The players' thoughts have the potential to further develop the team. They can illuminate elements I have not considered myself (...) Obviously, we can obtain things internally. As a coach, I have learned very much from the players I have trained. They can have great questions. They can even have great answers to questions I have not even thought of. They bring experiences from other environments and so forth».* As will be further elaborated in section 5.4.8, this indicates a state of situational awareness and mindfulness (Langer, 2000).

Coaches ↔ coaches: This faith is also evident within the team of coaches. Thus, they are also searching knowledge internally. *«We are discussing all the time: Is this right? Should we do this? I think we are tough, and have a good internal culture with respect to self-justice, making demands, and having heels raised, in order not to fall asleep» (T1). «We are focused on an involving approach to daily actions - so as we get an ownership to what we are doing» (T2).* Apparently, this has boosted the mutual faith and respect within the team of coaches. Nevertheless, *«it is important that all your statements and actions are justified professionally» (T6). «If you are only spitting opinions, you won't reach any breakthrough. However, the basis is that we are seeking inputs and listen» (T5).* Their interaction occurs both in informal and formal forum, however, their style of work is mainly informal. The head coach is really prominent and clear, and the team of coaches has to adjust "his watch" with respect to meetings and gatherings. Key elements in this regard are availability, a positive attitude, and job-satisfaction in their particular roles. The coaches acknowledge their functions, and that they are dependent on serving the head coach as best as possible - both in order for him to perform at his best - and for the functioning of the team as a

whole. Apparently, everyone believes in the same philosophy and working methods. They wish to contribute to the best results as possible.

Players ←→ players: There is also reciprocal respect within the group of players. This due both to what they have achieved professionally, and who they are in private. As mentioned, in order to generate an idealistic culture, everyone is screened both on personality and professional résumé. Furthermore, most of the players have represented the Norwegian national youth teams, and/or the senior national team. They often "steal" tips and tricks from other teammates. This holds especially for those who are in the same position. *«There is not just one single player you acquire and learn from. You steal some from everyone - things they are good at (...) Nevertheless, if there is one player you have an extra peek at, he probably poses the same role, and does lots of the same things as you»* (P6). Simultaneously, there is an open dialog with regards to sharing knowledge and experiences. The player selection unit also functions as trustees, as spokesmen, and as a link to the team of coaches, and the club as a whole. In addition, some kinds of mentor arrangements have been implemented, *«when there is very evident deviation in routine»* (T1). Nevertheless, this practice is often more automatic than enforced. The older players assist without having the coaches imposing anything.

The whole organization: The club as a whole is also signaling faith in the sporting unit. *«Everyone knows that the sporting unit has been competent, so we are respected»* (T1). At an annual banquet with the various units in the organization, under a discussion of where to place the reasons behind Odd's recent success, a representative from the sporting unit raised, and spoke with a humorous tone: *«We were called by Tv2 the other day, and told that we were enrolled into Norwegian Talents in the category for magic tricks»*. Disregarding the humor, this statement also witnesses of general acknowledgment of professional competence.

5.4 Organizational learning in Odds Ballklubb

Odd's recent success has stimulated confidence, persistence, motivation, security, and satisfaction. Furthermore, it has increased the coordinated pursuit of common goals and values, and enhanced efficiency. Reasonably, this success encourages the maintenance of status quo. Still, the sporting unit has been engaged in further

learning and development. Their practice has changed both in response to experiences with trial-and-error experimentation, and as a result of searching alternative routines. The following paragraphs illuminate some vital organizational conditions fostering organizational learning in Odd's sporting unit.

5.4.1 Failure legitimation

Sitkin (1992) pinpoints the importance of legitimizing individual failures, by accepting and supporting their occurrences. In several instances, Odd's team of coaches indicates the importance of failure. For example, the players are encouraged to stick to their tactical style ("Odd football"), even when playing against great opponents. For example, this was evident when leading 3-0 at 22 minutes against a superpower in soccer, Borussia Dortmund, but finally losing 3-4, and 5-11 on aggregate. Although losing, the head coach made a clear public commitment to support his staff who were willing to undertake an intelligent failure. The experience was determined an important learning arena, in which would assist the club in further development, and improvement. There were several visible examples of players making major individual failures. However, their positions within the club and the starting eleven were not harmed. In contrast, the players were declared heroes. Furthermore, the head coach took up the mantle of Odd's three consecutive losses in the semifinal in the Norwegian cup. These were legitimized and accepted, and seen as important experiences. Although recognizing that «it was tough being humble», humility was demonstrated. In Gaertner's (1988) words; failure was treated more as an episodic event from which a great deal could be learned, and less as an indication of "unfitness" to manage. Reasonably, Odd does not pursue failure for its own sake. It is a means to an end, not the end in itself. In this way, Odd's team of coaches facilitates intelligent failures, and utilizes the learning outcome for long-term performance (Sitkin, 1992).

5.4.2 Well planned actions

Odd has an evident match philosophy, and tactical style. However, it is challenging to plan adequately or anticipate potential outcomes when the domain is unfamiliar or difficult to predict (Sitkin, 1992). In other words, it might be

difficult to predict both how the opponents will act in particular situations, as well as how that team will approach their game plan. Thus, Odd emphasizes their own style of play. They play their own game. In this way, the actions and reasons for failure provide information on alternative future actions. This indicates organizational learning and adaption (Sitkin, 1992).

5.4.3 Failures of modest scale

The magnitude of the failure is obviously also important. The problems must be of modest scale; not so large as to be overwhelming, but still of such a size and scope as to be noticed (Sitkin, 1992). Fortunately, this can to some degree be manipulated and managed, and made more amenable, by scaling down the problems (Weick, 1984). After an unbeaten run of matches in 2015, Odd finally was beaten by an initially manageable opponent. It was not to be concealed that personal failures became decisive. Nevertheless, the situation was scaled down. The head coach made a public statement that no rearrangements were necessary. This indicates failure legitimation, and modification of failures. Furthermore, as the failures were investigated and discussed in plenum already the forthcoming day, these were executed and responded to with alacrity. This illustrates a speedy action cycle. In sum, these points indicate an effective learning cycle - similar to "the strategy of small losses" (Sitkin, 1992). Although Odd is «*always working in accordance with a very established philosophy*» (T6), the above analysis indicates that the sporting unit has also adapted routines and beliefs in response to direct organizational experience through trial-and-error experimentation, and search from a pool of alternative routines (Levitt & March, 1988).

5.4.4 Reluctance to simplify interpretations, and resilience and sensitivity to current operations

Odd is utilizing technology and knowledge in everyday practice. These are utilized to customize individual needs. There are different individual requirements and physical conditions. The team of coaches adjusts the everyday practice to optimize each player's development. Accordingly, they are observing and interpreting a bigger picture to avoid a simplified version of what influenced the results. The team of coaches has been innovative by utilizing better or more

effective solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, and existing market needs (Maryville, 1992). This has been accomplished by being open-minded towards flexible solutions and more effective products, processes, services, technologies, and business models that are readily available on the market. Odd's sporting unit has proven awareness to the surroundings and the market trends, and utilized both internal and relevant external resources. By screening the future of their business, they are *«focusing on always being one step ahead of the development»* (T3). This is not a sign of innovation in itself. However, the practical actions and flexible solutions that are implemented as a consequence of this reasoning, indicate innovative willingness and vigor. The following sections illuminate three prime examples of how the sporting unit indicates reluctance to simple interpretations, and facilitates resilience and sensitivity to current operations: The GPS-equipment, nutrition/body composition, and self-reporting on symptoms and overall body functioning.

1) GPS (Global Positioning System): This is an instrument that provides specific data, including meterage ran, number of high-intensity runs and sprints, and player load. Without downgrading the specific football-technical training, Odd has an extra focus on physical training. By acknowledging some lagging on physical conditions, *«we have an extra focus on the physical part as we think this is the part in which football is developing most in the years to come»* (T1). *«The meterage is not increasing, and the pitch will not be any bigger - the frames are very stable. What constitutes the difference between now and the future is the demand of acting at higher pace more often»* (T3). The club has evidently stated that pace and power should be prioritized throughout the club. This objective has been followed up by approaching various professionals within the field, such as Jordi Gonzalez, physical coach for the Norwegian national team, and other experts abroad. Based on the obtained knowledge regarding physical training, recovery, and injury preventive training, a fitness coach is employed. He is mainly responsible for mapping and analyzing the objective indications generated by the GPS-system. These data are integrated in the daily conversations and discussions with the rest of the team of coaches. It is utilized to manage the players' everyday workload. *«With the GPS-data, we have gone from speculating to actually*

knowing» (T5). In this way, it is perceived an important element in optimizing the everyday training.

2) Nutrition/body composition: Regular contact with external actors is an important element in the team of coaches' everyday practice. Besides having regular contact with an external expert in football and sports psychology, they have employed a diet and nutrition supervisor in a little posture. This person is hired mainly to examine the players' body composition. This encompasses the percentage of body fat, and weight. In particular instances, he also gives some advice on (low-carb) diets and nutrition, and follow-up on those players that are not satisfying the template of being a professional athlete at Odd. As body composition investigations have become a regular element in the everyday practice, it has become an internal competition among the players to get great results in this area too. Internally, the players are whispering about "the pinch". The diet and nutrition supervisor states that the players appear motivated by encouragement and bragging. Furthermore, he indicates that the results are *«extremely great: Among the best in Europe. Odd is in a special class when it comes to body fat percentage»*. Carrying unnecessary weight in today's football is unfortunate. It is compared to playing with a backpack. However, there are different ways of balancing energy distribution (in terms of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins). The club has gone away from imposing a low-carb diet. Nevertheless, it is not to make a secret of the importance of the regular observations, measurements, and follow-up. By being aware that the logical conclusion of an insufficient measuring implies exclusion from the starting eleven, Odd is pursuing freedom with personal responsibility. This has given results: *«In the past, we were football players. Now we are athletes»* (T2).

3) Self-reporting on symptoms and overall body functioning: Odd is also utilizing basic indications of the players' overall body functioning as an important element in their everyday practice. The players fill in a scheme that concerns subjective indicators of quality of sleep, energy level, playing readiness, strain and load on previous training, urine analysis, stiffness, soreness, and pain. These indications are investigated by the physiotherapist, and followed up by both actions and treatments. Accordingly, the self-reporting functions as a source for managing the training load. This is neither a sensational nor a particularly creative

way of obtaining an overview of the individuals' condition. Nevertheless, this is unquestionably a way of utilizing readily available internal technologies and services in an effective manner. Despite some obvious weaknesses or insufficiencies with self-reporting, I consider these reports as great initiatives that helps in transferring potentially vital information to a person that is professionally qualified to analyze it. What was initially considered a minor triviality might in fact prove to be crucial for the player's everyday training, and development.

5.4.5 Striving to discover failure and deviations in familiar and routine situations

By engaging in comprehensive analysis of both training sequences and matches, the team of coaches strives to discover failure and deviations in familiar and routine situations. Based on an evident style of play, and clear expectations on how each individual should act in the various roles, the feedback can to a certain degree be *system-focused*, rather than being exclusively *individual-focused*. This appear to be advantageous, as individuals do not fail in sufficiently systematic ways (Sitkin, 1992). Furthermore, the negative feedback might be somewhat de-individualized. For the actors directly involved, it is somewhat easier to swallow. In addition, it further reinforces the expectations of how to act in the future. This increases the likelihood of avoiding failures and deviations in the future.

5.4.6 Preoccupation with failures

The sporting unit is both focused on revealing errors and deviations, and correcting them in order to avoid unfortunate outcomes. For example, after inquiring with the player group, the team of coaches decided to cancel a scheduled training match against Jerv.¹¹ In this way, they revealed a potential issue of overload, and corrected their schedule. This indicates preoccupation with failures.

5.4.7 Fast feedback coupled with slow learning

A vital remark concerns Odd's fast feedback coupled with slow learning. The whole team has a weekly analysis meeting the day after match. Fast feedback is facilitated by reviewing important situations and incidents that occurred the day

¹¹ <http://www.varden.no/sport/odd-avlyser-mot-jerv-1.1501694>

before. However, a vital element is to avoid rushing to any conclusions, but rather to integrate reflection in the learning process. Therefore, how to approach the next rival is determined in another match meeting later the same week. In this way, the team can revise plans over a certain period of time. Accordingly, they are decoupling the speed of action/feedback from the speed of learning (Sitkin, 1992). In theory, the head coach clarifies that match results are secondary, or somewhat insignificant. As the perceived consequences of failure are reduced, this might foster willingness to take risks. Accordingly, Odd is facilitating a situation that can be utilized to make intelligent failures. In addition, their arrangement generates a wide array of independent data that is utilized to draw important implications (Sitkin, 1992).

5.4.8 Development of a richer action repertoire which increases the capacity to better adjust actions to the situation at hand

Odd socializes their members into a culture that promotes critical reflection. Different thoughts and multiple perspectives are welcomed, as these have the potential to further develop the team. This indicates a state of situational awareness and mindfulness (Langer, 2000). Argued by Sandbakk & Tønnesen (2012), this might be essential for fine-tuning training. The sporting unit holds a nuanced understanding of the present circumstances. They acknowledge their lag on physical conditions. They expect the football to develop intensively on pace and power. Based on this reasoning, the club has invested in physical affairs. Odd acts mindful by combining fragments of old routines with novel actions into a unique response to deal with a unique input (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). The sporting unit demonstrates eagerness not only to keep pace with development. They also identify new dimensions of the context which increase their chances of staying ahead of the development (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). The sporting unit is not merely engaged in a short-term operational result focus. In contrast, by taking a long-term focus, they call attention to continuous development and improvement. This enhances their chances of determining decisive factors of the process that cause the results. Accordingly, they might discover deviations even when performing great. This facilitates continuous learning to generate a sustainable competitive advantage in professional sports

(Andersen, 2009). In this way, Odd manages to stay competitive in an increasingly more global, competitive, uncertain, turbulent, and complex elite sports environment.

5.5 Methodical examples that are in conflict with the principles of continuous performance development

So far, this section has clarified and exemplified some underlying processes that have been decisive to Odd's permanent capacity and achievements. Apparently, the sporting unit practices simple yet detailed-focused performance development. Nevertheless, it would have been an overstatement to declare Odd as an idealistic mindful organization. Apparently, the degree of mindfulness variate between and within the various main processes of Odd's performance development, as well as among the coaches, supporting staff, and players. Based on the theoretical framework, the following paragraphs present some evident characteristics of Odd's working methods that deviate from what is considered adequate and reasonable performance development. Practical initiatives are suggested.

1) GPS: An essential concern with regards to the GPS tracking, is that the "player load" is relative. For example, an exceptionally fit player might run as much and as fast as a player that is totally out of form, and thus achieve the same player load. Nevertheless, their experience and actual load will differ significantly. Furthermore, one might be skeptical to some individuals becoming too focused on doing good at the GPS indicators. This might result in goal displacement, and negligence of the optimal performance. My perception is that some of the players increase their effort in unnecessary sprints and behavioral patterns in order to generate "extraordinary", or at least "sufficient" GPS data. This tendency is also reinforced by compliments and praise from representatives in the team of coaches who are basically not qualified for analyzing those data. This testifies different degrees of mindfulness among the coaches, supporting staff, and players. The team of coaches should to a greater extent acknowledge that the statistics are relative in relation to each player and position. Those individuals who are sincerely qualified for interpreting the GPS data should also present the data in order to avoid a simplified version. In accordance with Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld's (2008) suggestion, the head coach should subordinate hierarchical rank

to expertise and experience. In this way, the team will avoid being blinded by the statistics, or succumb to goal displacement. Furthermore, it will help in keeping focus on the underlying processes, so as to understand how and why the plant grows to become a flower in bloom (Chambliss, 1989).

2) Pulse: A related issue concerns the heart rate monitoring. Although using chest pulse sensors in the vast majority of training sessions, it is obvious disagreement regarding the gain of this data. Although the physical coach states that it constitutes one of more indications that can guide the whole, the head coach consider pulse as uninteresting. The heart rate data provides an indication of strain. However, the players have not implemented any test of maximum heart rate. As the players' pulse only provides a relative indication of their strain compared with their maximum heart rate, this data is close to worthless. Accordingly, Odd is generating a quantity of data in which is not utilized in any way. With regards to the time and money that is in fact put into this equipment, it can be considered a significant vast of resources, and effort. It appears more important to generate the data than actually to investigate it. The learning outcome depends on their interpretation, and how they make sense of the information. This testifies attention to minor details, but not sufficient reflection to promote reliable learning, and further development. In the sports science literature, there is general agreement that intensity and duration are the two factors that are most decisive to the athletes' performance development in aerobe endurance sports.¹² Accordingly, in order to optimize the players' everyday training, they should have a relative pulse profile to relate to. This is vital for mindfulness in planning, implementation, and analysis of performance development.

3) Nutrition: Switching from a carbohydrate-based diet to a low-carb diet can be tough. Internally, it is acknowledged that it potentially provokes drainage of strength. Still, Odd conducts guidance on such a diet in an extremely tough and intensive training period on La Manga. This does not appear to have been thoroughly considered. Apparently, the team of coaches is not conscious to what the players are actually eating, neither how they take hold of the advices. However, they are really concerned about the results of the regular measurements.

¹² <http://www.olympiatoppen.no/fagomraader/trening/utholdenhet/fagartikler/oltsintensitetsskala/page594.html>

In other words, the coaches are emphasizing the *results*, but do not care sufficiently about the *process* that is prescribed. They are concerned with identifying and measuring the player's fat percentage. Nevertheless, the emphasis is not directed against the diet and energy balance that lead to the target. My experience is that some players are achieving the desired fat percentage using unfavorable methods. This come at the expense of optimal preparation, training, and recovery. The sporting unit should to a greater extent acknowledge the importance of appropriate meal patterns and food choices. Most probably, by keeping focus on these elements, the player's will achieve the requested body composition in a suitable manner.

4) Team/Individual focus: The individual focus somehow arranges for an egoistic approach. The leadership philosophy stresses that *«even though ambitions on behalf of the team are great, the sporting unit shall be characterized by people that possess personal ambitions»*. Accordingly, the sporting unit is somewhat deemphasizing the individuals' accountability for the function of the whole. Thus, the collective focus is to a certain degree neglected. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that Odd's success is based on the collective. Football is considered a team sport: *«We are concerned about the collective; that is the most important»* (T2). *«The most important is to reinforce the "we"»* (T3). *«Egoists who were dominant is not here anymore»* (T7). *«Egoism and selfishness is cracked down on. If it does not help, you get eliminated from the team»* (T1). These reasonings are in conflict with exclusive individual ambitions. In fact, such discrepancy might provoke unfortunate affairs, such as drama and conflicts in transfer and contract issues. Furthermore, the individual-focused player development might benefit at the expense of the collective-focused team organizing, or vice versa. This is a balancing act I consider forever a controversy under the current philosophy.

5) Individual development goals: In connection with this, there are some weaknesses that regards the individual development goals. It is not sufficient to state individual development goals. The objectives must also be aspired through systematic training (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). This appears somewhat blurred. *«Although the coaches have an evident developmental plan, and the group is having a great culture in terms of training a lot, the plans are not followed to the*

letter by everyone» (P8). «I have always tried to develop what I believe in, and not what they believe in» (P6). Accordingly, this practice seems to provoke a potential conflict in the most important development areas. The players' individual development goals do not always correspond to Odd's philosophy. In contrast, they to some degree do oppose the players' accountability for the function of the whole. Perhaps the development areas should rather be characterized by the specific roles in their style of play. The players should be willing to develop in harmony with Odd's philosophy. In this way the team will be composed by players that strive for developing expertise in roles that are complementary in a common interaction pattern. My perception is that the players are conscious of their own training/development. They are aware of the optimal preparations, high quality in execution, and mindfulness in the evaluations. The ambitious players perceive Odd as a springboard club. To a certain degree, this reasoning is in alignment with the first principle in the leadership philosophy. Nevertheless, there are some obvious conflicts with regards to what should be emphasized in the daily development. This has consequences for the training outcome (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Apparently, this ambivalence is somewhat ignored or undetected by the team of coaches.

6) Routines in working methods: The team is always working in accordance with the same principles. Their specific routines hold regardless of success or failure: *«Focus is always on the same, regardless of success or adversity. There is no change, we work in accordance with the same philosophy (...) It might be some simplifying when we are struggling, however, it is the same framework. We believe that a clear philosophy - that regards both to people and the style of play - creates continuity. This contributes to security» (T1). March (1994) suggests that routine-driven behavior adheres to a logic of appropriateness: Actors consider the context in which they find themselves, and ask what behaviors are suited to that context. Nevertheless, a specific routine may produce different outcomes, at different times, or different routines may produce the same outcome at different times (Levitt & March, 1988). This is the case with the fluctuating nature of the elite sports environment. In fact, it might be the case within a single season. Accordingly, in some cases, Odd's working methods might deviate from what is considered adequate and reasonable performance*

development. The above analysis indicates that the sporting unit adapts to changing technology. They have avoided being retained to traditional modes of decision making. Nevertheless, based on fixation on a rigid perspective, they might have adapted to close-mindedness, or shifted over to modern modes while casting off their experiential base (Rochlin, 1993). Their working methods are somewhat rule and routine governed. This indicates a degree of mindlessness. During their campaign, Odd should to a greater extent combine fragments of old routines with novel actions into a unique response to deal with a unique input (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). In this way, the sporting unit might gain the flexibility to determine decisive factors of the process that cause the results (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003). This facilitates continuous learning, and enhance the possibility to generate a sustainable competitive advantage in professional sports (Andersen, 2009).

5.6 Summary

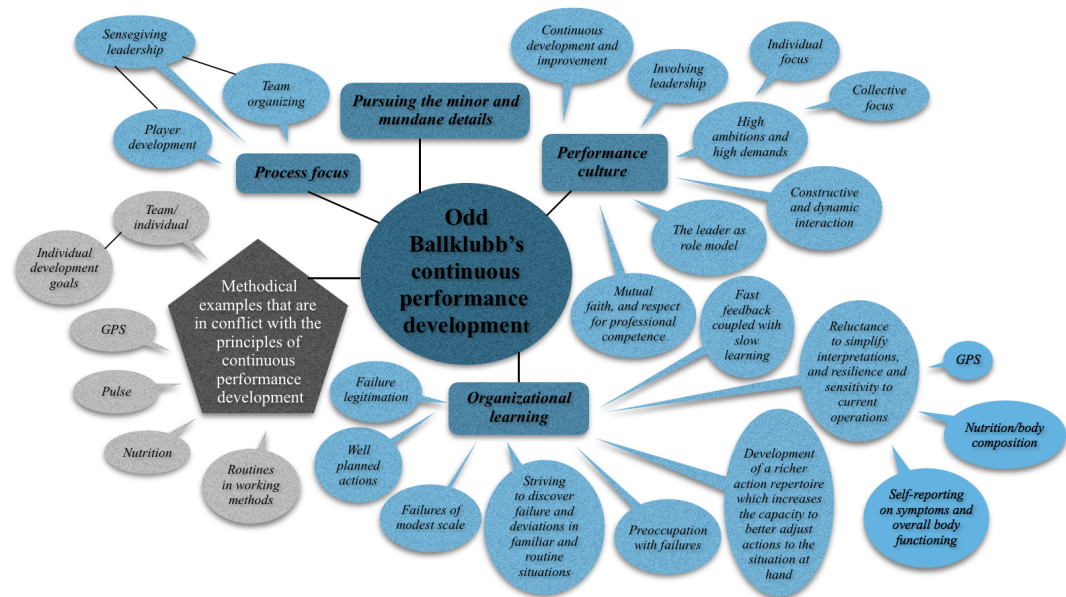


Figure 9: Miniature illustration of the main characteristics of Odd Ballklubb's continuous performance development

This case study presents profound insight into Odd's simple yet conscious and detailed-focused performance development. Apparently, it is modified through an evident and pervaded performance culture, as well as true elements of mindfulness in their organizational learning processes. Odd's sporting unit

indicates a truly remarkable example of how to promote performance development with restricted resources and "ordinary" people. In general, Odd manages to focus mainly on the underlying processes that lead to the results. They are balancing the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). Rather than put emphasis on quantity in their working methods, they focus on quality, by pursuing the minor and mundane details. The head coach is clear in his leadership philosophy, and is engaged in comprehensive sensegiving of his testament. Nevertheless, there are some obvious elements in their player development and team organizing that deviate from what in theory facilitate continuous performance development.

A recurring theme is simple and detailed-focused performance development. Odd is not much different from the teams they outperform. This study suggests that the difference lies mainly in their approach and consistency to care greatly about the minor and mundane details. They do not simply do more of the same exercises, preparations, and evaluations. They do them better. Quality in every details inevitable add up. Odd has a climate that manages to keep focus on both performance and mastery; result and process, respectively. In this way, the sporting unit enhances the possibilities of improving the processes that form the foundation for superior performances. Apparently, their ways of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning and development processes assess and secure performance *before* it appears, correct *during* the process, in order to ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction, as well as provide feedback and rewards *afterwards*. Accordingly, the team of coaches facilitates necessary adjustments and continuous improvement of organizational performances in a modern working environment (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009).

Odd has experienced great benefits of their success which goes way beyond the actual points and positions in Tippeligaen. In accordance with Sitkin's (1992) predictions, this success has stimulated confidence, persistence, motivation, security, and satisfaction. Furthermore, it has increased the coordinated pursuit of common goals and values, and enhanced efficiency in their daily practice. Nevertheless - based on the two principles that what was done yesterday might not be good enough tomorrow, and that you can always get better

- the sporting unit is endeavoring continuous development and improvement. In this way, they appear to avoid the "liabilities of success" (Sitkin, 1992). Their motivation for pursuing new approaches has been equivalent (or even greater) during the period of success. By recognizing that new actions are in fact needed to maintain great performances, the sporting unit has excluded the liability of complacency. The members have demonstrated situational awareness to detect deviations even when performing great. They have been engaged in comprehensive search for new inputs and knowledge, and focused the attention mainly to the affairs that concern their predictions of the development of the sport.

The team of coaches is focusing on always being one step ahead of the development by screening the future of their business. In this way, they are seeking better or more effective solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs (Maryville, 1992). Subsequently, these initiatives have resulted in new actions, and applications. This risk-taking behavior indicates innovation and flexibility. Accordingly, they have avoided being stuck in a vicious circle of risk-aversiveness, even in an era of success. Although being loyal to the club philosophy and style of play, and in this way facilitating a certain homogeneity in the team, it has been regular replacement of players, staff, and operating procedures. In alignment with the philosophy of a club that emphasizes development, apparently the team of coaches has balanced the ideals of consistency and security, with renewal and "heterogeneity". The sporting unit has been engaged in continuous learning and development, by constantly seeking even more advantageous practices. This might be one of the key elements of recreating their success. As previously mentioned, these initiatives are neither unmanageable nor very difficult to conduct. In contrast, they are relatively ordinary. Nevertheless, over time, by professionalizing every details, these result in firmly integrated habits (Chambliss, 1989). Apparently, the engaging style of leadership has been vital in this process. By both actively involving in others' affairs, as well as having others involved in themselves (Fische, 1998), the actors are engaged in participation, discussion and cooperation, and somewhat involved in decision processes.

Furthermore, Odd's sporting unit balances the individual and collective focus. It is recognized that individuals are generating unique performances.

However, performing great individually is not necessarily in contradiction with taking responsibility for the whole. On the one hand, it is stated that the sporting unit shall be characterized by people having personal ambitions. On the other hand, the members acknowledge that the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, they are settled on having a strong collective unit composed of several individualists that want to reach their personal goals without tottering.

It is stated that the sporting unit in Odd shall be characterized by positive people that have offensive mindsets, and high ambitions. Furthermore, they shall demonstrate the willingness to do whatever is necessary for achieving the objectives. The ambitions are offensive and evident, and impose strict requirements to both subordinates and leaders. These are facilitated through constructive and dynamic interaction, an evident internal justice in all levels, and a leader that appears as a role model of demonstrating eager and willingness. Also, there is freedom of expression and brutal openness, and the expressions are taken seriously. In this regard, the individuals indicate having mutual respect for professional competence and knowledge (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

Nevertheless, there are some methodical examples that are in conflict with the principles of continuous performance development. It is evident that Odd's individual focus somehow arranges for an egoistic approach. This implies that the collective focus to a certain degree is given lower priority. Furthermore, a specific routine may produce different outcomes, at different times, or different routines may produce the same outcome at different times (Levitt & March, 1988). Accordingly, their routines in working methods are somewhat vulnerable to the fluctuating nature of the top sports environment. The team of coaches might also be somewhat result focused when it comes to the regular measurements and statistics that concern GPS, pulse, and nutrition. By heavily emphasizing the *results*, they give lower priority to the underlying *process* for what is prescribed. It appears more important to generate the data than actually investigate it. Thus, they are neither learning nor developing from it. One might draw some parallels between Odd and mindful organizations. Nevertheless, by relying on distinctions and categories drawn in the past, and somewhat being on automatic pilot in everyday working methods, some members of the sporting unit also indicate mindlessness (Langer, 2000). Apparently, the degree of mindfulness variate

between and within the various main processes of Odd's performance development, as well as among the coaches, supporting staff, and players.

6.0 Discussion and implications

This section is initiated with a summary of the study. Thereafter, the text further elaborates the research questions, and discusses some essential elements. These sections result in the main conclusion. Some implications of this proposition are presented. The section concludes with recognizing limitations, and requesting future research.

6.1 Summary

This case study documents performance development in a Norwegian top level football club. In light of theory that regards continuous performance development, there are some elements that appear decisive to their permanent capacity and achievement. Odd's team of coaches has managed to keep a balanced focus on the individuals and the collective. They are clearly engaged in individual player development. At the same time, they commit to rigorous and careful team organizing. The basic idea is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In general, their working methods are focused on improving the nature and quality of the processes that influence results. Their obsession with the minor and mundane details makes simplicity into a religion. Several simple but conscious initiatives are fitted together in a synthesized whole. This arrangement is promoted by an evident and pervaded performance culture. Noteworthy, Odd's working methods have changed both in response to experiences with trial-and-error experimentation, and as a result of searching alternative routines. The sporting unit has utilized intelligent failures, in particular through process focus, and failure legitimation. Furthermore, the members have displayed critical reflection and mindfulness by seeking to stay ahead of the development, utilizing technology and knowledge in everyday practice, as well as demonstrating flexibility and sensitivity to current operations. This has made them capable of detecting deviations even when performing great. By satisfying the somewhat opposing requirements of short-term results and long-term performance development, the club manages to stay competitive in a dynamic and highly competitive elite sports environment. The direction along Odd's road to success is

simple yet conscious and detail-focused performance development. It exemplifies the mundanity of excellence.

6.2 Research questions

The main purpose with this case study was to illuminate the performance development in Odd's sporting unit. It concentrates on a) how Odd develop individual players, organize the team, and practice leadership in light of specific theory, and b) what are the key factors to their comparative advantage. The angle of approach deals with the performance development process, in contrast to a more result-focused perspective, as within the performance management literature. By Norwegian standards, the prominent success of Odd is well known. Nevertheless, that is not to say it is well understood by club leaders, players, spectators, competitors, and other stakeholders. This study takes a closer look into the development of capacities that are essential to win matches. Based on this reasoning, the following research questions were deduced: *In light of theory that regards continuous performance development, how is Odd Ballklubb's team of coaches planning, implementing, and evaluating processes that characterize their player development, team organizing, and leadership? Which underlying processes have been decisive to their permanent capacity and achievement?*

The head coach is mainly responsible for planning, implementation, and evaluation. However, he also consults the other coaches, and the group of players. Their concerns are integrated in the process. The planning starts with taking the teams' ambitions and objectives into consideration. These constitute the end of their pursuit: The results. It is recognized that focusing on results is important. However, being exclusively oriented towards results is considered heavily disadvantageous. It is important also to recognize what kind of development and actions that are necessary to reach those goals: The actual means. This implies a process focus. Internally, this is referred to as being development-oriented. The means are initially based on their predictions of the future requirements of the sport. In order to make necessary initiatives, GPS-statistics, regular conversations, daily self-reporting schemas, and the match schedule are taken into account. Overall, these elements represent the total load. The daily work is then regularly adjusted on the basis of this data. Furthermore, Odd engages in comprehensive

preparation and practice on such elements as a high line of confrontation, and regaining possession. The team of coaches underlines the importance of learning and performance development in relations and interaction. Focus is on mastering their style of play as best as possible during both training/preparation and competition. This reasoning is manifest in their team organizing. Through systematic planning, the team of coaches manages to practice a balanced focus on mastery and performance. This is facilitated through sensegiving leadership.

The implementation is characterized by reflective and mindful actors. The players attend the trainings focused on *training*, and not merely on *being trained*. They are always seeking development and improvement. In contrast to conduct regular measurements as a way of quality assurance, the team of coaches is mainly keeping focus on minor and mundane details in the everyday player development. This is also evident with regards to team organizing. The team of coaches is practicing evident distribution of responsibilities during the training sessions. For example, in one training the head coach might coach the whole, while the assistant coach keeps attention to an individual player or a single element - such as the back four. In this way, the team of coaches is keeping a systematic focus on quality in the processes, and, if necessary, interrupt the sequences to provide feedback and guidance, or introduce potential necessary initiatives. In this way, the team of coaches manages to make adjustments and include new initiatives and actions to further develop and improve (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009).

Video analysis constitute a vital part of the evaluation process. This tool is utilized in various training sessions, as well as in both friendly matches, and competitive matches. The leader of development is responsible for coding the matches. This includes looking back upon experiences by engaging in comparisons, considering alternatives, seeing things from various perspectives, and drawing interferences (Jordan, Messner & Becker, 2009). This process generates data for interpretation (Weick, 1995). Thereafter, some selected sequences are analyzed through fruitful and productive discussions with the head coach, the assistant coach, and the player developer. Their analysis and conclusions are presented in the weekly analysis meetings, where an open dialogue is inquired. This is an essential element in Odd's team organizing. The

video analysis is also made available for the group of players outside this setting. From a bird's eye view, the players can investigate sequences on their own, as well as in interaction with other players in their layer portion. In this way, the team of coaches facilitates development of mindfulness amongst the players. Also, video recordings are regularly implemented in conjunction with practicing on individual development goals during training sessions. This is conducted in order to cultivate reflection and situational awareness during the execution phase. Such critical reflection may be essential for fine-tuning training (Sandbakk & Tønnesen, 2012). Nevertheless, neither generating a knowledge foundation nor engage in critical reflection is sufficient in itself. The learning outcome of interpretation and evaluation is decisive. Argued by Andersen, Hansen & Hærem (2015), in order to promote reliable learning, one is dependent on continuous refinement and development of a richer action repertoire which increases the capacity to better adjust actions to the situation at hand. This study suggests that the team of coaches' ways of planning, implementing, and evaluating contribute to assess and secure performance at *beforehand*, correct *during* the process, as well as facilitate adjustments *afterwards*. Accordingly, the sporting unit has succeeded in implementing the key mechanisms of reflection (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015), and thus promoted reliable learning. The members manage to detect deviations even when performing great. This enhances their ability to develop capacities that are essential to win matches, and to stay competitive in an ever-changing elite sports environment.

6.3 Main conclusion

During my investigation of Odd's sporting unit, I realized that the individuals do not trigger overwhelming excitement. They are only "ordinary" people that do particular plain things to perform great in top-level football. Nevertheless, what and how the team of coaches, supportive staff, and players are practicing is rather interesting: It is very mundane. And although skeptics and malicious tongues might state that this finding does not induce particular excitement in itself, that is actually the point. Apparently, the simple doing of certain small tasks generates huge results (Chambliss, 1989). Odd is not much different from the teams they outperform. The difference lies mainly in their approach and consistency to care

greatly about the minor and mundane details. They do not simply do more of the same exercises, preparations, and evaluations. They do them better. Quality in every details inevitable add up.

Odd's consistent superiority of performance is not merely the product of chance. In contrast, their success results from simple yet conscious performance development. This include obsession with perfecting the small details. Their actions are neither unmanageable nor terrible difficult. In contrast, they are relatively ordinary. Nevertheless, over time, by professionalizing every details, these result in firmly integrated habits (Chambliss, 1989). In this way, the sporting unit enhances the possibility of influencing and improving the processes that realize the full potential of their people and resources to form the foundation for superior performances. By keeping focus on the *processes*, we can see how and why the plant grows to become a flower in bloom (Chambliss, 1989).

Based on patience and passion for mastering the minor details in the everyday practice, they manage to balance the focus on preparing for the upcoming match (short-term result focus) with long-term performance development (process focus). Odd's team of coaches has a unique way of linking individual player development with team organizing through involving and sensegiving leadership. Although engaging in comprehensive sensegiving of a particular point of view, this study suggests that their working methods foster situational awareness and considerable mindfulness. Apparently, this generate a comparative advantage of continuous performance development. Consciousness and obsessive perfection of the minor details result in truly extraordinary success. This is "the mundanity of excellence".

6.4 Implications

An important implication for other organizations and clubs, is the awareness that continuous performance development necessitates exemplary critical reflection, and mindfulness. This regards to planning, implementation, and evaluation of working methods. Nevertheless, you do not necessarily need to be a rocket scientist in order to achieve extraordinary results with "ordinary" people. Rather, the simple doing of certain small tasks might generate huge results (Chambliss, 1989). Accordingly, on the one hand; emphasizing the little things, and constantly

seeking to perfect the small details set high requirements to all the involved actors. Doing simple is not necessarily simple. Argued by Steve Jobs: «Simple can be harder than complex». Nevertheless, on the other hand; it can be very mundane and uncomplicated, and thus very much achievable. The initiatives that promote continuous performance development are not necessarily particularly special. The difference lies mainly in the quality of the execution. Within Odd's sporting unit, this declaration can be utilized as a documentation of what actually works. It might also constitute a foundation for practical improvements and further development. In addition, other clubs and organizations that are practicing under similar conditions can make use of this case as a frame of reference. It might be utilized to discover shortcomings or defects in their own practice, as well as an example of how to practice daily working methods.

Obviously, results, statistics, and points are the most quantifiable there is to document performance. The well-known football journalist Ivar Hoff once stated that *«there is nothing that honest, correct, and ice-cold as a football table. It does not lie»*. However, this study indicates that a criterion to recreate success is to keep attention to mastering the underlying work tasks and processes, rather than becoming too centered on the obvious and manifest outcomes. Focus should be on the minor and mundane details in everyday practice. This strategy increases the likelihood of drawing the right inferences, and thus make adjustments and include new initiatives and actions in order to further develop and improve (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009).

6.5 Limitations and future research

There are some limitations of this study. One of these concern the methodology. As previously indicated, the rigor of qualitative research has been subject to continuous discussion in the literature (Boeije, 2010). The research design facilitates subjective interpretation. In a worst case scenario, this might result in a non-representative representation (Kawulich, 2005). According to DeWalt & DeWalt (2002), participant observation is conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection. Therefore, the researcher should acknowledge how his/her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach might affect observation, analysis, and interpretation (DeWalt &

DeWalt, 2002). Although constantly endeavoring making systematic reporting of all evidences, I recognize that the analysis and conclusions constitute my subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, by acknowledging this issue before initiating the study, and conducting preventive initiatives, I may have reduced or avoided some biases (Mehra, 2012). Furthermore, my field notes encompass exact quotes when possible, use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, and provide descriptions without inferring meaning. The transcribing was also done with high accuracy, in terms of literal writing, even when there were elements of highly informal character, in-orderly sentence structure, and swearwords. By integrating adequate and systematic use of original data in the presentation of my analysis, the readers can be assured that the interpretations relate to the data gathered. These are attributes of good field notes (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999).

Another limitation concerns the case study approach's difficulty with establishing causal explanations (Bennett & Elman, 2006). It is more manageable and convenient to demonstrate how a phenomenon can be understood and interpreted in light of theory. This approach is somewhat vulnerable to close-mindedness. Accordingly, this study might include a brilliant but narrow-minded judge, in terms of lacking flexibility or breadth of view. The findings and analysis should only be understood in light of the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the analysis has been undertaken by one researcher mainly. This might be decisive for inter-rater reliability. The observer bias implies that subtle prejudices influence both the way the researcher interacts with subjects in the study, and what the observer choose to see, interpret, and conclude on. However, one might argue that the triangulation of both participatory observation and semi-structured interviews might decrease this bias, as you collect a number (more or less) independent measurements. Also, I had several independent actors reviewing my observations, findings, analysis, and conclusions. They were asked to provide their subjective opinions on the procedures, and final results. This might represent a certain degree of inter-rater reliability. In addition, my practical knowledge of elite sports, and how to conduct this kind of study are determinant for the validity (Smith, 1990). Being familiar with both the "football glossary"¹³

¹³ <http://www.football-bible.com/soccer-glossary.html>

in general, and the community and jargon at Odd, are also considered advantageous.

Another important remark is that the implementation of the interviews might be affected by leading questions, and the interviews may be transcribed differently (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As previously mentioned, in order to prevent this negative impact, the interview guide was formulated to avoid a leading subtext undertone, and the transcribing was done with the highest accuracy.

Another limitation regards to the target sample. It is obviously restricted. This might imply that the findings are not manifest in different organizations, under different circumstances. However, statistical generalization was not considered a vital element in this study. In contrast, one might argue that the findings constitute an analytical character, and that this case study is generalizable to theoretical proposition (Yin, 2009).

This study encompasses the sporting unit of a Norwegian top level football club. It documents the precise nature of a unique case. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to investigate whether it also represents a more typical case. Other researchers might address similar issues and research questions in different industries and sectors. Furthermore, while this study utilizes a group/department level of analysis, future studies should investigate corresponding research questions at both individual, and organizational level of analysis. Although taking a somewhat historical approach, by considering the evolution of Odd Ballklubb's resources and practical conditions over the last ten years, it would be of great interest also to conduct a longitudinal case study. In this way, one might obtain an even broader basis for establishing change over time, determining causal mechanisms, and illuminate patterns of transitions. The research project could also be implemented as a multiple case study, by investigating and comparing more cases in their whole. It would be particularly interesting to investigate teams that have experienced success, but which have not been able to recreate their performances. Reasonably, evidence from more case studies can be more compelling.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Information letter and informed consent

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt

”Arbeidsmetodikken i sportslig avdeling i Odds Ballklubb”

Bakgrunn og formål

I forbindelse med min mastergradsstudie i ledelse og organisasjonspsykologi ved Handelshøyskolen BI, der «kontinuerlig læring og utvikling» er tema, ønsker jeg å kunne benytte meg av deg som informant gjennom et intervju hvor dette temaet belyses.

Formålet med studien er å belyse hvordan arbeidsmetodikken i sportslig avdeling i Odds ballklubb understøtter teori om optimalisering og profesjonalisering (f.eks. prestasjonskultur, performance management, organisasjonslæring). Dette innebærer fokus på *hvordan det tilrettelegges for kontinuerlig læring og prestasjonsutvikling*.

Oppgaven tar utgangspunkt i den organisatoriske delen av sportslig avdeling i klubben, og hvordan det jobbes med tanke på læringsprosesser, samt å skape/legge til rette for kontinuerlig utvikling.

Hva innebærer deltagelse i studien?

Deltagelse i studien innebærer et semi-strukturert intervju. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg litt om bakgrunnen din, samt utviklingsprosesser, læringsprosesser og prestasjonskultur/gryppedynamikk i klubben/laget. Denne informasjonen vil registreres ved notater eller båndopptak. I tillegg vil jeg observere laget i daglig samhandling tilknyttet trening, kampforberedelser og i kamper.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Kun min veileder (professor Svein S. Andersen) og undertegnede vil ha tilgang til informasjonen gjennom studien, og denne tilintetgjøres ved endt prosjekt: 01.09.2016.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt

samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Jeg håper du synes dette prosjektet høres interessant ut, og har mulighet og ønske om å bidra. Dersom du har videre spørsmål til prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt for nærmere forklaring og gjennomgang.

Mvh, Andreas Grøgaard
Mastergradstudent ved Handelshøyskolen BI
Spesialisering: Ledelse og organisasjonspsykologi
Tlf: 91803322
E-post: andreas-grogaard@hotmail.com

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Samtykke til å foreta intervju med:

båndopptaker

notater

Appendix 2: Interview guide; coaches and supporting staff**Intervjuguide: Trenere og støtteapparat****1. Bakgrunn**

- 1) Kan du beskrive litt rundt dine år i klubben? Tillegg: Hvordan er *forholdet* og *ansvaret* i forhold til spillerne og de andre i trenerteamet og støtteapparatet?
- 2) Hva vil du si er *visjonene* og *målene* til klubben? Tillegg: Er disse endret i løpet av din tid i klubben?
- 3) Kan du beskrive lagets *filosofi*? Tillegg: Er denne endret i løpet av din tid i klubben?

2. Prestasjonsutvikling**2.1 Utviklingsprosesser**

- 1) Kan du beskrive *strukturen/arbeidsstilen* i klubben? Tillegg: Uformell, formell?
- 2) Kan du beskrive hvordan dere jobber for å skape utvikling/*prestasjonsutvikling* i klubben/*laget* med tanke på a) *planlegging*, b) *gjennomføring*, og c) *evaluering*?
- 3) Kan du beskrive hvordan utviklingsprosessen er med tanke på planlegging, gjennomføring og evaluering er i forhold til *hver enkelt spiller*? Tillegg: Har dere en mal for *hva* som forventes/måles, samt *hvorfor* dette er viktig og *hvordan* det måles?
- 4) Hvordan planlegger spillerne sin trening? Tillegg: Setter spillerne seg *egne mål*? Isåfall; evalueres disse på noen måte?
- 5) Kan du beskrive hvordan utviklingsprosessen er med tanke på planlegging, gjennomføring og evaluering i forhold til *hver enkelt i trenerteamet*? Tillegg: Setter trenerne seg egne mål?
- 6) Hvordan planlegger trenerne øktene? Tillegg: Hva skjer under/etter øktene? Evalueres øktene?
- 7) Hva er dere opptatt av når det kommer til gjennomføring av utviklings- og læringsprosesser? Tillegg: Hvor er fokuset?

- 8) Etter en periode med *gode* resultater, hvordan jobber dere? Tillegg: Hva fokuseres det på?
- 9) Etter en periode med *dårlige* resultater, hvordan jobber dere for å snu den dårlige trenden? Tillegg: Hva fokuseres det på?
- 10) Hvordan jobber dere i sportslig avdeling for å tilrettelegge best mulig for utviklingen til spillerne? Tillegg: Kan dere bli bedre på dette?

2.2 Læringsprosesser

- 11) Kan du beskrive *læringsmetodikken* i klubben?
- 12) Bruker dere noen form for *læringsmodell*? Tillegg: Hva er i tilfelle bakgrunnen for at dere bruker eller ikke bruker?
- 13) Hvordan *evaluerer* dere det spillerne og det dere ansatte gjør? Tillegg: Hva skjer med resultatene av evalueringene?
- 14) Har dere noen form for *evalueringstaktikk*? Tillegg: Vektlegges det dere bør bli bedre på eller det dere er gode på?
- 15) Hvis noe ikke går som forventet, hvordan håndterer dere det? Tillegg: Hva er *konsekvensene av å mislykkes*?
- 16) Hvordan vil du beskrive *tilbakemeldingsprosessen* mellom spillerne og trenerne/støtteapparatet? Tillegg: Formell/uformell?
- 17) Hva *ønsker* dere å bli bedre på i klubben?
- 18) Hva *hindrer* dere i å bli bedre? Tillegg: Hva er konsekvensene av at forbedring og utvikling uteblir?
- 19) Har klubben kontakt med *annen ekspertise*? I tilfelle; kan du beskrive prosessen ved bruk av eksterne aktører?

3. Prestasjonskultur

- 20) I hvilken grad jobber dere med *gruffølelsen* i laget? Tillegg: I hvilken grad erfarer du gruppen som en sammensveiset gjeng?
- 21) I hvilken grad jobber dere med å *gjøre hverandre på laget gode og lære av hverandre*? Tillegg: Bruker dere enkelte spillere (lang erfaring, status osv.) aktivt?
- 22) I hvilken grad erfarer du at gruppen er samlet om en *felles plattform*, med tanke på: a) strategier og planer for å oppnå ønskede resultater, b) ulike roller/bidrag, c) må eller vil det samme?

23) Organiserer dere spillergruppen på noen måte for å skape en *læringsarena*?

24) Organiserer dere spillergruppen på en måte som bidrar til *utvikling/læring*?

25) I hvilken grad erfarer du at spillerne/ansatte har *tiltro til lederteamet*? Tillegg:

I hvilken grad har de respekt for deres profesjonelle kompetanse?

26) I hvilken grad erfarer du at det er intern konkurranse mellom spillere i samme posisjon? Tillegg: Hvordan håndterer spillerne å bli satt ut av laget?

27) Hva er dine *personlige ambisjoner* som trener? Tillegg: Hva er ambisjonene dine for *laget*?

*Appendix 3: Interview guide; players***Intervjuguide: spiller****1. Bakgrunn**

- 1) Kan du fortelle litt om din *bakgrunn som fotballspiller*, før du kom til klubben?
- 2) Hva vil du si at *nåværende klubb* har betydd for deg og din utvikling som fotballspiller?
- 3) Er det andre *personer* som har betydd mye for din utvikling som fotballspiller? I tilfelle; hvilke andre personer har betydd mye for deg og din utvikling som fotballspiller? Tillegg: Hvordan har du kommet i kontakt med disse?
- 4) I hvilken grad har du tiltro til *trenerteamets profesjonelle kompetanse*? Tillegg: Hva er deres sterke og svake sider?

2. Utviklingsprosesser

- 4) Kan du beskrive hvordan *trenings/utviklingsprosessen* er i klubben (planlegge, gjennomføre og evaluere)? Tillegg: På hvilken måte *evaluerer du* treningen du/laget gjennomfører?
- 5) Varierer treningene gjennom året, i forhold til før- og under sesong? Tillegg: Tilpasses treningene i forhold til motstandere og totalbelastning?
- 6) Har laget en egen *treningsfilosofi* som alle spillerne følger? I tilfelle; hva fokuseres det på? Følger dere denne treningsfilosofien til punkt og prikke?
- 7) Kan du beskrive *din treningsfilosofi*? Tillegg: Hva fokuserer du på? Har du fulgt denne til punkt og prikke, eller har du eksperimentert?
- 8) Hva er grunnene til at du/dere trener på den måten du/dere gjør? Hva ligger til grunn for valget?
- 9) Hvordan *tilrettelegges* det i klubben for at du kan utvikle deg best mulig som fotballspiller?
- 10) Hva føler du klubben er opptatt av når det gjelder din og lagets utvikling? Tillegg: Er det klargjort a) *Hva* som forventes?, b) *Hvorfor* dette er viktig?, c) *Hvordan* utvikling måles?

- 11) Hvordan *evaluerer* dere det dere selv gjør og det de ansatte gjør? Tillegg: Blir det gjort noe med *evalueringen i etterkant*?
- 12) Hvis den reelle tilstanden ikke svarer til forventningene dine: a) Hvordan jobber du da?, b) Hvem snakker du med?, c) Føler du at det er rom for å gi tilbakemelding?

3. Prestasjonskultur/gruppedynamikk

- 13) Kan du beskrive *din rolle* i laget/klubben?
- 14) Har du noen personer i laget som bidrar til din utvikling? Tillegg: a) Hvilken rolle spiller de andre spillerne på laget for dine prestasjoner? b) Lærer dere av hverandre? Isåfall; på hvilken måte?
- 15) Hvilken rolle spiller trenere, støtteapparat og administrativt organisasjonsledd inn i *din utvikling*? Tillegg: Fokuseres det på dine individuelle mål og utvikling?
- 16) Kan du beskrive en periode da du opplevde mye *sportslig motgang*? Tillegg: Hvorfor forekom denne motgangen? Hva gjorde du for å snu motgangen?
- 17) Kan du beskrive en periode da du opplevde mye *sportslig medgang*? Tillegg: Hvorfor forekom denne medgangen? Gjorde du noe for å opprettholde medgangen?
- 18) Hva er dine *personlige ambisjoner* som spiller? Tillegg: Er andre involvert i disse ambisjonene, med tanke på tilbakemelding og oppfølging?
- 19) Hva er ambisjonene dine for *laget*? Tillegg: Har disse endret seg i takt med utviklingen klubben har erfart?
- 20) I hvilken grad erfarer du at det er intern konkurranse mellom spillere i samme posisjon?



GRA 19003
Preliminary Thesis Report

«Professionalizing through continuous
learning and development»

*A case study of the working methods
in Odds Ballklubb`s sporting unit*

Study Program: Leadership and Organizational Psychology

Date of submission: 15 January, 2016

Campus: BI, Oslo

Thesis supervisor: Professor Svein S. Andersen

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1. Introduction

In a labour market characterized by a dynamic nature, fierce competition, high uncertainty, complexity, interrelatedness, and speed (Brooks, Weatherston & Wilkinson, 2010), the twenty-first-century organization must be predicated on constant change, not stability; organized around networks, not rigid hierarchies; built on shifting partnerships and alliances, not self-sufficiency; and constructed on technological advantages, not bricks and mortar (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). Consequently, a key to success is continuous learning and development (Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

These attributes are also manifest in Norwegian top-level football. The market has become more global, and the Norwegian clubs experience hard competition from more prosperous foreign actors. In order to be competitive and survive, the clubs need to offer something more than lucrative pay agreements (Pedersen, 2013), such as a high-quality sporting environment facilitating continuous learning and development. Odds Ballklubb (Odd) has been imposed a situation characterized by other requirements for success than certain competitors. The club has relatively scarce resources, and lacks an economical foundation making it neither competitive at the international nor the national player market. Nevertheless, the club has demonstrated significant action force within a restricted regulation framework. The sporting environment is well-known for its quality, and for having success with developing own players (Haugen, 2014). Based on a progress-oriented mindset, the club has integrated general competence with both domain-specific knowledge and functional expertise. This foundation is adjusted to the players and team as a whole. Apparently, Odd has found a way of «mobilizing competence in the team to manage getting the most out of every member» (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Through systematic in learning and development processes, the club has professionalized its working methods to increase the probability of sustainable high performances.

In this regard, feasible underlying success factors include performance culture, performance management, and organizational learning. These concepts appear to be prerequisites for generating as well as regenerating performances at all levels of the organization. Nevertheless, although recognizing the importance of such concepts, organizations tend not to integrate a systematic approach

(Skarbøvik, 2014). Starbuck & Hedberg (2003) document that most organizations manage to achieve success, however, only a minority manage to recreate the success. The European Employee Index 2013 demonstrate that we are relatively poor in dimensions characterizing performance culture¹⁴, and performance management systems are seldom implemented in an ideal way (McAdam, Hazlett & Casey, 2005). Furthermore, organizations tend to emit the same responses despite unstable and changing stimuli (Weick, 1984), thus cultivating unfavorable approaches to organizational learning. In other words, there is a significant potential to generate performance cultures, to put performance management in more well-functioning systems, and to integrate analytical experience-based learning processes that increase the probability of also recreating great performances (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003).

By implementing an in-depth investigation of Odd, this study seeks to investigate how the sporting unit operates. Based on a qualitative approach to everyday interactions, the focus of attention regards how the team of coaches is planning, implementing and evaluating learning and development processes. This implies looking for systematic and organized practice, in contrast to mainly render performances to coincidences and luck. Odd's organizational model, their leadership philosophy and practical conditions are considered as latent variables, and constitute the context. Performance management, performance culture and organizational learning constitute the theoretical framework. In order to produce profound understanding, both participant observation and semi-structured interviews are utilized. By implementing participant observation; the rich, real-world context in which the phenomena occur is emphasized (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, by conducting semi-structured interviews with wisely chosen representatives, it is assumed to facilitate insight to the informants' feelings, thoughts and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this way, this study investigates whether the recent success can be attributed to methodical practice and professionalism.

¹⁴ Ennova, A. B. (2013). European employee index 2013, http://no.ennova.com/media/246786/eei_no_2013_web.pdf

2. Relevant literature

The theoretical framework is characterized by theory on continuous optimization and professionalizing of working methods. This includes performance culture, performance management and organizational learning. This is chosen in order to understand essential aspects of the context embracing the research question. Furthermore, how to mobilize resources, and to organize for continuous learning and development will be illuminated and discussed. Related research and literature will also be taken into consideration.

2.1 Organizational culture

In general, performance culture is regarded as a form of organizational culture. Accordingly, it is reasonable first to clarify this concept. As with several other concepts within social science, it appears difficult to agree on one singular definition of the culture notion (Bang, 2013). This is illustrated by Kroeber & Kluckhohn's (1952) presentation of 164 different definitions. The concept is often used in everyday speech. Under such informal circumstances, popular definitions/metaphors with jargon are widespread. Some examples are «the way we do things around here» (Deal & Kennedy, 1982), «the corporate's DNA»¹⁵, «the non-verbal communication code» (Cremer, 1993), «the secret sauce» (Smith, 2012), and the «the root of the organizations» (Greenberg, 2011). These indications are easily conceivable, nevertheless, it might be discussed to what degree they are embracing the relative vast and abstract aspect of the organization. The research literature presents definitions of more comprehensive and precise character. Bang (2013) incorporates the most applied core elements in scientific articles and journals in his elucidation: «Organizational culture is those sets of common norms, values and perceptions that develop in an organization when the members are interacting with each other and the surroundings, and which are demonstrated in terms of the members' actions and attitudes at work». This definition embraces the most essential aspects of the organizational culture concept. Accordingly, it is used as frame of reference in this thesis.

¹⁵ <http://corporatednaconsulting.com>

2.2 Performance culture

By regarding performance culture as a type of organizational culture, it might be stated that a performance culture implies emphasis on valuing and aspiring performances (Skarbøvik, 2014). In this regard, it is essential to clarify:

Performance culture does not necessarily implies continuous success, rather it involves a fundamental mindset cultivating a trying and failing approach, based on courage and desire to *constantly improve* (Vik, 2007; Andersen & Sæther, 2008).

There are several basic characteristics of a performance culture. At the one side, Stensbøl (2012) emphasizes the *individual focus*, in terms of individual goals concerning results and development; mastering focus, in terms of measuring one's own progress; evident clarification of expectations; involvement and accountability; valuation of the individuals; feedback, and necessary support and follow-up; humor and humour; and an outlook at mistakes as learning experiences. At the other side, cultivating interaction and mobilizing a strong collective setting is decisive (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). This imply a *collective focus*, in which a strong inner order tells that «we are performing together», «we are a team, not a group» and that «although having individual goals, we are responsible for the whole» (Stensbøl, 2012). Vik (2007) and Andersen & Sæther (2008) further concretize these points in terms of high ambitions and high demands, passion for the work, orientation towards innovation, and willingness to do whatever is necessary for achieving objectives. In order to enhance the ability of mastering, it is decisive to settle on offensive goals, and face the consequences of these with a positive and patient attitude (Stensbøl, 2012). An important aspect in this regard is to keep attention to mastering work tasks and processes, instead of becoming too centered on the results and outcomes. This distinction is illustrated by Andersen (2009), documenting the well-known speed skater Johan Olav Koss` process focus on skating as best as possible, instead of being addressed schematic by lap times, as in fact is the common procedure within the sport.

Summarized by Andersen & Sæther (2008), the vitality of performance culture is continuous development, organization and mobilization of human resources to achieve innovation and flexible solutions. In order to have success,

the cultural agreement should provide meaning, direction and support for ambitious goals, and serve as the basis for constructive and dynamic interaction (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Interestingly, in this perspective, culture is viewed as an important precondition for effective leadership. Simultaneously, it is widely acknowledged that leadership is a vital element to achieve performance culture within an organization (Kaas, Kaggstad & Kristiansen, 2007; Vik, 2007; Andersen & Sæther, 2008; Stensbøl, 2012). As stated by Andersen & Sæther (2008), performance culture provides a collective identity, and links formal structure and authority with informal mandates and processes.

2.3 Performance management

Argued by Aguinis (2009), only people can produce a sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, performance management systems might be considered as key tools that can be used to transform people's talent and motivation into a strategic business advantage. In conjunction with the growing understanding of the role of human capital in firm success, performance management has become increasingly important as managers in different industries and sectors are under constant pressure to improve the performance of their organizations (Holloway, Francis and Hinton 1999). According to Aguinis (2009), performance management constitute «a continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams, and aligning performance with the strategic goals of the organization». The key components include a *continuous process*, and that performances are in *alignment with strategic goals*. The intention of implementing such a system concerns aspects such as strategy, administration, communication, development, organizational maintenance, and documentation (Aguinis, 2009). According to Schraeder & Jordan (2011), the important methods of managing performance include performance measurement/appraisal, rewards and recognition, training, access to resources, goal setting, participation and empowerment, coaching and feedback, mentoring, positive organizational behavior, and innovative work design. In sum, performance management is about «doing the right things», as well as «doing the things right».

According to MacKay (2007), «improving performances will not just happen, they must be managed». This statement implies that great leadership is a

matter of necessity in order to achieve great organizational performances. Although leadership basically is about promoting performances (Vik, 2007), performance management encompasses the more concrete and continuous activities of determining performance objectives, evaluate performances, as well as providing feedback on those performances in order to further develop and improve (Aguinis, 2009). In other words, performance management roughly constitutes the three practices of assessing and securing performance *before* it appears, correcting *during* the process, in order to ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction, as well as providing feedback and rewards *after* implementing the process. Those factors that influence performance reasonable diverge from one case to an other, and from corporation to corporation. Thus, as stated by Vik (2007), great performance leadership is characterized by a leader applying the most essential features that influence the performance of subordinates within the particular organization. Roughly summarized, all initiatives utilized to guide and motivate subordinate`s performances constitute a part of performance management (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009). In this way, great performance management has the potential of facilitating adjustments and continuously improve organizational performances in a changing and modern working environment (Heslin, Carson & VandeWalle, 2009).

2.4 Organizational learning

Organizational learning involves the process through which organizational units change and adapt as a result of experience (Argote & Ophir 2002). This process allows the organization to stay competitive in an ever-changing environment. With regards to continuous learning and development, analytical evaluation and reflection are essential.

Based on studies on high reliability organizations (HROs), Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2008) deduce the theory of mindful organizations. These are characterized by rich awareness of discriminatory detail, and emphasize socialization of individuals into a culture promoting critical reflection. Critical reflection may be essential for fine-tuning training (Sandbakk & Tønnesen, 2012). This includes looking back upon experiences by engaging in comparisons, considering alternatives, seeing things from various perspectives and drawing

interferences (Jordan, Messner & Becker, 2009). This sensemaking-process generates data for interpretation (Weick, 1995). In a process of continuous professionalizing, Odd utilizes various equipments such as analytical programs, GPS measurement, and various physical tests. Nevertheless, neither generating a knowledge foundation nor engage in critical reflection is sufficient in itself. The learning outcome of interpretation and evaluation is decisive. In order to promote reliable learning, one is dependent on continuous refinement and development of a richer action repertoire which increases the capacity to better adjust actions to the situation at hand (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015). This is essential for Odd in order to stay competitive in an ever-changing top-sports environment. Figure 1 illustrates the key mechanisms of reflection that promotes learning.

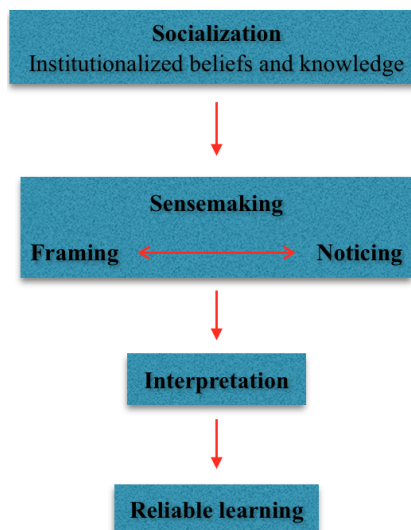


Figure 1: Key mechanisms of reflection (Andersen, Hansen & Hærem, 2015)

2.5 Organizing for continuous learning and development

Based on research and empiricism on best practice, one might argue that professionalizing can be facilitated through systematic performance culture, performance management and organizational learning. The following section presents how to organize for continuous learning and development through these concepts.

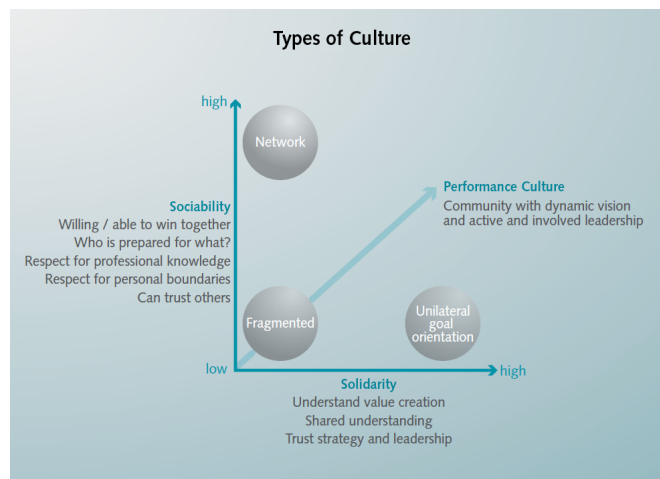


Figure 2: Four major types of culture (Andersen & Sæther, 2008)

Performance culture: Based on research concerning decisive factors for achieving outstanding results with "ordinary" people, both in business and top sports, Andersen & Sæther (2008) identify main dimensions and key elements for mobilizing a performance culture (see figure 2). The model presents two main dimensions: Sociability and solidarity. Argued by Andersen & Sæther (2008), sociability might be facilitated by five key factors: 1) willingness and ability to engage in active interaction, 2) intimate knowledge of each person's strong and weak sides, 3) respect for professional competence, 4) respect for personal boundaries, and 5) basic trust in work-related relationships. Nevertheless, in order to create harmony, the agents also need to be attuned in their efforts. Solidarity is assumed to promote essential direction in the processes. Andersen & Sæther (2008) document four key factors that facilitate this attribute: 1) shared understanding of activities and value creation; vision and business concept, 2) shared understanding and acceptance of strategies, and plans intended to realize the vision and business concept, 3) shared understanding of roles and contribution in association with strategy, and 4) employees' faith in the top leader.

These dimensions are presented as fundamental preconditions for mobilizing performance culture. Nevertheless, certain conditions regarding both the subordinates and the leaders should also be present. Andersen & Sæther (2008) argue that subordinates must have high ambitions, as well as being oriented towards innovation and value creation. Regarding leaders at all levels, active and involving attitudes towards subordinates appear decisive. In addition, they must serve as contributors to an operative and reflecting culture

development. Accordingly, a performance culture imposes relatively strict requirements to both subordinates and leaders. Nevertheless, a great performance culture appears vitalizing and motivating, by promoting direction for the organization and its members (Andersen & Sæther, 2008). Thus, it contributes to great performance.

Performance management: Aguinis (2009) presents six main stages within a well-functioning, continuous processing system of performance management (see figure 3).

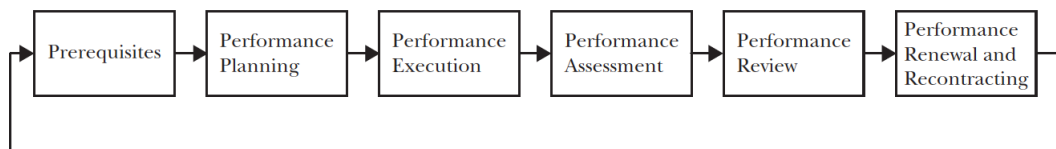


Figure 3: Flow of the Performance Management Process (Aguinis, 2009)

In Odd, people interact dynamically and interdependently, and share a common and valued goal, objective, and mission. Accordingly, this organization's instance includes a team component (Aguinis, 2009). How can Odd modify the various stages of the performance management process to accommodate a team component? Salas, Burke & Fowlkes (2006) emphasize the importance of the following basic principles in such a team context: Making sure that the team is really a team; making the investment to measure; clearly defining measurement goals; using a multi-method approach to measurement; focusing on process as well as outcomes; and measuring long-term changes. Regarding prerequisites, Aguinis (2009) argues that, in addition to consider the team as a whole, they need to identify KSAs that will allow individuals to make a positive contribution to the team. In terms of performance planning, team-level considerations concerning expectations of behaviors, results and development must be included. Regarding performance execution, Aguinis (2009) emphasizes the importance of team members being committed to goal achievement. Furthermore, the team members should take a proactive role in seeking feedback from one another as well as from the supervisor (if there is one). In terms of performance assessment, all team members should evaluate one another's performance as well as the performance of the team overall (Aguinis, 2009). Concerning the performance review, Aguinis (2009) argue for both a common meeting to discuss overall team performance,

including results achieved by the team as a whole, as well as an individual meeting focusing on how the individual's behaviors contributed to team performance. In the performance renewal and recontracting stage, the performance planning is repeated, however, this time with the insights and information gained from the other phases in mind. Accordingly, the team might include some new key accountabilities and competencies, and some goals may have to be adjusted either upward or downward (Aguinis, 2009). In this way, the team exhibits signs of organizational learning.

Organizational learning: Continuous learning and development can also be facilitated by cultivating characteristics of a mindful organization (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). This implies an adaptive organizational form, in which might be a key to success in an increasingly complex environment. Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2008) present the following distinctive processes of such an arrangement: Preoccupation with failures, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to current operations, commitment to resilience, and underspecification of structures. In practice this includes embracing failure and deviations to avoid them in the future; by observing and interpreting the whole picture to avoid a simplified version of what influenced the results; striving to find failure and deviations in familiar and routine situations; being resilience to unpredicted occurrences in order to implement necessarily actions, as well as utilize the change that is absorbed; and to gain flexibility by enacting moments of organized anarchy and a garbage can structure, as well as subordinate hierarchical rank to expertise and experience (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). As previously mentioned, the Norwegian top-level football is characterized by a more global, competitive, uncertain, turbulent, and complex environment. A mindful organization combines fragments of old routines with novel actions into a unique response to deal with a unique input (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008). A key is to determine decisive factors of the process that causes the results (Starbuck & Hedberg, 2003). This appear to be a prerequisite for continuous learning, and thus essential to generate a sustainable competitive advantage in top sports (Andersen, 2009).

3. Research question

The main purpose with this case study is to illuminate working methods in Odd's sporting unit. In particular, it seeks to investigate how the team of coaches is planning, implementing and evaluating learning and development processes. The problem to be addressed regards how the sporting unit facilitates continuous learning and performance development, in order to generate and regenerate performances. From this reasoning, the following research question is deduced:

How is the team of coaches planning, implementing and evaluating learning and development processes with respect to theory on performance culture, performance management and organizational learning?

4. Method and sample

In order to illuminate and answer the research question, a qualitative methodical approach is adopted. The project is conducted in the form of a case study. Both participant observation and semi-structured interviews are implemented. Furthermore, in order to obtain an overall comprehension, I will also utilize several informal conversations with people attached the club and some document analysis. The following section presents the methods, and gives an account for why the particular sample was included.

4.1 Case study

A case study encompasses an approach in which a phenomenon is subjected to intense investigation and analysis. The case might constitute «whatever bounded system is of interest» (Stake, 1983), e.g., an individual, organization, event, or action, existing in a specific time and place. In conjunction with this, the related contextual condition is of great importance. The boundaries are identified by the investigator, and continually kept in focus in order to determine what is and what is not of particular interest. Within this study, the case encompasses the sporting unit of Odd. Their organizational model, leadership philosophy, and practical conditions constitute the context.

There is no obvious conclusion to what a case study is or should be (Andersen, 2013). Nevertheless, when implementing this kind of research, the richness of the phenomenon is investigated in a holistically fashion over a

sustained period of time (Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2013), the underlying reason for choosing this approach is often a request for promoting understanding of a complex, contemporary social phenomenon within a real-life context, when the researcher is questioning *how* or *why*, and the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated.

Among the obvious advantages with the case study approach are the rich descriptions of subjects, the reduced difficulties concerning control, the great portrayal of experiences, and the foundation obtained to make practical improvements. These are central concerns for this particular study. In addition, the case study facilitates critical reflexivity, and is therefore effective for generalizing using the method of falsification (Popper, 1959). Accordingly, the method can assist illuminating whether Odd in fact is practicing theory or not.

4.2 Participant observation

Participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities Kawulich (2005). It is regarded an adequate method in this case study as it provides the context for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Furthermore, as participant observation constitute learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting (Kawulich, 2005), the process arrange for experiencing the rich, real-world context in which the phenomena occur (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Accordingly, this method facilitates investigating the research question.

As a fieldwork arrangement, participant observation involves «active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience» (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). This requires that the researcher demonstrates a certain amount of deception and impression management (Bernard, 1994). Participant observation constitutes the process of establishing rapport within a community, and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it (Kawulich, 2005).

Accordingly, it affords access to the «backstage culture» (De Munck & Sobo, 1998), and allows for describing behaviors, intentions, situations, and events as understood by one`s informants - participating in unscheduled events (De Munck & Sobo, 1998). In sum, participant observation is regarded to generate a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study, in which is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

Participant observation is useful in providing ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). Furthermore, it makes it possible to identify and guide relationships with informants, provides a feeling of the cultural parameters, and provides the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants (Kawulich, 2005). In triangulation with interviews, it is also possible to check definitions of the interviewees` terms, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants (Kawulich, 2005). In this way, the method is facilitating involvement in sensitive activities (Bernard, 1994).

Argued by DeWalt & DeWalt (2002), if conducted adequately, participant observation increases the validity of the study. This statement holds even stronger when the method is combined with the use of additional strategies, such as interviewing and document analysis, or in triangulations with other more quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires (Kawulich, 2005). In this study, various methods are utilized. Accordingly, one might reduce the incidence of «reactivity», or people acting in a certain way when they are aware of being observed (Bernard, 1994). By conducting this type of field work, I seek to gain entry into Odd`s community. Based on Kawulich`s (2005) manual, I will select gatekeepers and key informants, participate in as many different activities allowed, clarify my findings through member checks, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations, and keep organized, structured field notes to facilitate the development of a narrative that explains various cultural aspects to the reader.

4.3 Semi-structured interview and interview guide

According to Gill et, al. (2008), qualitative research interviewing is the adequate method when seeking to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters. Compared to purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, research interviews are believed to provide a richer understanding of social phenomena. This implies that they are striking deeper than a daily conversation in terms of structure and purpose. Accordingly, interviews are most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon, or where detailed insights are required from individual participants (Gill et. al, 2008). They are also particularly applicable for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Thus, establishing a perception of being a competent, trustworthy and honorable person is of great importance in order to obtain the desired outcome (Andersen, 2013). In other words; although the interview situation is a social setting, it must be characterized by professionalism.

The formulation of a interview guide was initiated early in the thesis project. Nevertheless, it further developed in parallel with generating the theoretical framework of the study. This evolution contributed to higher-quality questions, and had me better prepared for constructive and suitable following-up questions during the interviews. Also, inquiring Pedersen (2013), which had implemented a similar study in Viking FK and Tromsø IL, about his preparations, experiences and issues, further assisted my work. With Pedersen`s (2013) consent on using his interview guide as a point of departure - accommodating it for my research question and subject matter - I had a relative reliable foundation for collecting the qualitative data.

4.4 Sample

Huberman & Miles (2002) indicate the importance of strategic selection of a sample in relation to the issues to be addressed in qualitative studies. In this case, the selection was based on an analytical rationale, determined in a feature analysis of aptness and qualification. Thus, the informants included might be termed *key informants*. According to Andersen (2013), key informants are persons that are

considered possessing a particularly good overview and insight to the research question. They are selected due to having plenty of resources within their domain, and as they are considered helpful in describing the social reality that constitutes the subject matter (Andersen, 2013). The following characteristics were emphasized: Considerable time as engaged in the club, and profound understanding and comprehension of daily operations, functions and activities in the sporting unit. These occupational qualifications are presumed to be essential in order to obtain the relevant information (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005), and thus help illuminating how the sporting unit facilitates continuous learning and performance development. In this way, the probability of securing adequate and informative interviews and data was probably increased (Patton, 1990). In order to illuminate an overall impression, and thus enhancing the possibility to answer the research question, the final sample of key informants constituted both players, trainers and supporting staff.

5. Tentative plan for completion of thesis

My master thesis project began during early spring 2015. After attending professor Svein S. Andersen`s lecture on qualitative research (and case studies in particular), I immediately contacted him personally. I demonstrated my profound interest in the subject matter, and requested him to be my supervisor. Fortunately he accepted my request. Thereafter I contacted the head coach of Odd, and gave an account of my tentative plan and thoughts of the project. I was warmly welcomed, and implemented some preliminary conversations, interviews and participant observation the following weeks. Thereafter, I followed the club mainly at distance through the summer. However, I attended some training sessions, and a daily preparation meeting with the coaches. I was also introduced to their analysis program, plan of action, current issues, training and match patience etc.

From January 18-29, I will attend Odd's training camp on La Manga. Here I will live with the team, and attend all kinds of activities; from meals, games and daily interaction in general, to training preparations and trainings, player meetings, match preparations and matches. A training camp provides an adequate arena for in-depth investigation. Also, it gives me an excellent opportunity to follow Odd in a decisive preparation period. Information and knowledge gathered from this period can also constitute an important frame of reference for comparing different periods of the season. Furthermore, the training camp will be utilized to implement interviews with the team of coaches, supporting staff and players. I have prepared a specific interview guide for trainers/supporting staff, and a interview guide for players only. The selected sample of interviewees have received «an inquiry of participation in a research project». This briefly presents the background and purpose, what their participation actually implies, how the information and data will be handled, and states the voluntariness of taking part in the project. Each and all have signed the information letter, as well as marked whether they allow for the interview to be implemented with a recorder, or notes only.

After this training camp, a certain period will be devoted to writing up findings, and interpret and analyze both interviews and tentative observations. Thereafter, I will alternate between conducting more participant observation in Skien, and write on the empirical part of the thesis. If necessary or required, more interviews will also be implemented. This heavily depends on the profit and degree of saturation from the already conducted interviews. Concerning the final summing up and drawing of conclusions, I will wait as long as possible, in order to embrace Odd's start of the season, their performance phase, and thus further investigate whether there is alignment between theory and practice.

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