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Daring to dream: Leadership practices in Norway's U20 national football team

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Daring to dream: Leadership practices in Norway's U20 national football team



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The manager of Liverpool Football Club, Jürgen Klopp, once stated (Western Union, 2019); *“That is what leadership is - you have strong people around you with better knowledge than you; you don’t act like you know everything; and you’re ready to admit that you have no clue in a particular moment.”* Writing this master thesis has provided us with a leadership experience, where we have had the pleasure of working together with great people in order to get the most accurate and best results possible.

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CONTENT

CONTENT	I
LIST OF FIGURES	II
SUMMARY	III
PART I: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE STORY	1
1.2 RESEARCH MOTIVATION.....	2
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION	4
PART II: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	6
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2.2 LEADERSHIP PRACTICES	6
<i>2.2.1 Five leadership practices</i>	6
<i>2.2.2 Balancing horizontal and vertical leadership</i>	8
2.3 GIVING BEHAVIOR.....	9
<i>2.3.1 Givers, takers and matchers</i>	9
<i>2.3.2 Giving behavior and knowledge sharing in sports</i>	10
2.4 APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY	12
<i>2.4.1 The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry</i>	13
2.5 VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP.....	15
PART III: METHODOLOGY	17
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	17
3.2 ABDUCTIVE INQUIRY	17
3.3 RESEARCH METHOD	18
<i>3.3.1 Quality of the data</i>	19
3.4 DATA COLLECTION.....	20
3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	21
PART IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	23
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	23
4.2 “THE CONDUCTOR WHO LETS PEOPLE PLAY SOLO”	23
<i>4.2.1 Responsibility and trust from the beginning</i>	23
<i>4.2.2 Story: the match against Germany</i>	27
<i>4.2.3 Including the players in decisions</i>	28
<i>4.2.4 Balancing horizontal and vertical leadership</i>	30
4.3 A TEAM FULL OF GIVING BEHAVIOR	30
<i>4.3.1 Knowledge sharing: cooperation with competitors</i>	31
<i>4.3.2 Role models</i>	32

4.3.3 <i>Sanctioning wrong behavior</i>	35
4.3.4 <i>Threat from the outside</i>	36
4.3.5 <i>Effects of giving behavior</i>	37
4.4 CREATING A COMMON DREAM FROM THE DREAMS OF THE INDIVIDUALS	38
4.4.1 <i>The 4-D Model</i>	38
4.4.2 <i>Discovering potential and ambitions</i>	38
4.4.3 <i>Daring to dream</i>	39
4.4.4 <i>Designing a systematic plan</i>	41
4.4.5 <i>Making a future destiny</i>	44
4.5 CONVERTING VALUES INTO ACTIONS - A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO VALUE-BASED LEADERSHIP	44
4.5.1 <i>A unique unity</i>	44
4.5.2 <i>The ability to make the impossible possible</i>	47
4.5.3 <i>The team’s work with their values</i>	48
4.5.4 <i>Effects of value-based leadership</i>	51
PART V: CONCLUSION	53
REFERENCES	57
APPENDICES	61
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE PLAYERS	61
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE COACHES	62
APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM.....	63
APPENDIX 4: PICTURE: STAIRWAY TOWARDS THE WORLD CUP	65

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Balanced leadership events (Müller et al., 2018).....	8
Figure 2: The 4-D model in appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003 p.83)......	13
Figure 3: Timeline for interviews	21
Figure 4: The 4-D model of Norway U20	38

SUMMARY

To examine the success of the U20 Norwegian male national football team of 2019 from a leadership perspective, this thesis considers several success factors that may have helped the team reach the World Cup. It applies the theories of giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and value-based leadership to analyze the leadership practices within the team. Based on semi-structured interviews with 10 interview subjects, including the head coach, players and staff, the authors outline and discuss their findings from the interviews in combination with existing theory. The research identifies four main factors that have been decisive for the team's success: (1) *combining long-term dreams with short-term goals*, (2) *balancing vertical and horizontal leadership by allowing people to take advantage of their strengths*, (3) *creating a continuous giving behavior within the group* and (4) *applying unorthodox approaches to the implementation of values*.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The story

It is like heaven and hell. There is a significant difference. Things have been totally changed and insanely much better. [Tarjei, player]

This quote from a player for Norway's under-20 (Norway U20) male national football team, which is comprised of players born no earlier than January 1, 1999, describes his perspective of the overall change that has occurred for this team in recent years.

Three years ago, the team was ranked in 42nd place among European countries. The players felt unsuccessful, and the results on the pitch were poor. After hiring a new coach in December 2016, who brought along his own staff, the team developed extensively in only three years. Today, the situation is completely different. In the summer of 2018, Norway U20 impressed in the European Championship and qualified for the U20 World Cup in Poland in May 2019. They were one of only six European countries – including Poland, the host country – to qualify for the tournament. Over the years, the U20 World Cup has hosted players such as Lionel Messi, Diego Maradona, Paul Pogba and Sergio Agüero, who have become superstars in the football realm. The tournament is highly rated, and only two other Norwegian national teams have ever qualified (26 and 30 years ago, respectively). In the World Cup, Norway U20 won only one of their three games and were knocked out from the group stage. However, in the game that they won, they scored 12 goals, and their striker scored nine goals alone, which is a record in U20 World Championships of football.

This team qualifying for the World Cup is a tremendous inspiration for the players, but also for the other national teams and the clubs and regions where the players are on daily basis. The World Cup is also a fantastic place for development and a showcase for the players. [Nils Johan Semb]

Together with the remarkable results of Norway U20, this quotation by Nils Johan Semb, the Head of Elite Football for the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF), from December 2018 (Madsen, 2018) raises the question, “which factors have contributed to the success of the U20 national team?”

Another interesting element is that the NFF has developed three main values - *unity*, *råskap* and *pride* – that should be implemented by all of their teams, the compositions of which range from 15-year-olds to seniors. *Råskap* is a Norwegian word that is difficult to translate. It relates to brutality, barbarism and savagery (NAOB, 2019), but it does not necessarily have negative connotations. The meaning of *Råskap* may also be close to that of toughness, roughness, braveness or excellence in certain areas. The NFF’s aims for these values to create a sense of collectivism among the teams to lead to success for them all (Norges Fotballforbund, 2016, p.18). The success of one national team is a victory, but continuous success throughout their teams is the ultimate hope. This insight prompts further questions: Has work with the NFF’s three values contributed to the success of Norway U20? If so, how can their success be transferred to the other teams in the NFF?

1.2 Research motivation

Human aspects of leadership are the topics that have attracted our interest the most during our five years at BI Norwegian Business School. While studying topics from psychological aspects to more direct leadership theories, we have been fascinated by the process of creating values and results by building up teams and treating the members as human beings rather than merely small pieces of a large puzzle. Additionally, we both have a strong interest in all kinds of sports but especially football. Furthermore, we genuinely believe that encouraging positive interactions between people and supporting effective collaboration are crucial aspects to consider for organizations in all areas of business, sports and everyday life.

From our first interviews, which were conducted in early December 2018 and January 2019, it became clear to us that the head coach of the team, Paco, was “*the brain*” behind the results. He was in charge and respected by both players and staff. Therefore, he is highlighted as the main actor behind this success story. Early in the research process, we realized that generating a broader picture of the success itself, the giving behavior, and the team’s approach to appreciative inquiry would require us to examine the coach’s role in more depth than we had originally intended.

He is the best coach I have ever had. You can ask every player on this team, and they will say the same. You start wondering: What do the others do? Why do not they do the same? What do they do? I feel that he is so many steps ahead. [Lars, player]

Paco was described as “the brain” with a long-term plan who is one step ahead of the others and always aware of the overall picture. In his first gathering with the team, he instilled a dream in the player’s minds by presenting a stairway that explained each step that would ultimately lead to the World Cup trophy. Based on comments from the players, none of them believed that this achievement was possible. However, they managed to reach the World Cup. Prior to the tournament, many of the players admitted that they believed it was possible for them to win the trophy. We repeatedly realized that the team was special and led by a special coach with high ambitions who managed to garner support for his dreams and desires. This knowledge triggered us to further investigate how the team has converted the dream into reality.

We thought: “Do you believe? What do you think of us?” We had those kinds of feelings. But as time goes by, we look back and can laugh about it. Because we have taken almost every step he told us about. The only thing left is the World Cup trophy. [Lars, player]

Early on, Paco was introduced to us as a systematic, hard-working person who has firm expectations of both his staff and his team members.

Once, I wondered if we had forgotten to do a task. Then I thought about it one more time and remembered that, of course, he has fixed it. [Egil, staff]

The coach was described as distinct and strong in his beliefs. However, our impression prior to the research was that he was always open to new ideas from both the staff and the players. We believed it would be interesting to interrogate how he manages to balance confidence in his own ideas with a receptiveness toward others, which is a challenge for many leaders.

He made me feel that I was his choice from day one. He chose me and had 100% trust in what I knew. I almost felt that he wanted to learn from me - I got that kind of feeling. You feel appreciated even before you have started working. [Håvard, staff]

Based on the preliminary findings, we decided to search for stories of Paco’s efforts to create a strong, positive belief among the players by stating that nothing is impossible. Therefore, the research question concerns this theme. Before conducting the research, we hypothesized that his choice to dedicate time to getting to know each individual human being was crucial for the results of the team.

With regard to team building and constructing successful teams, the topics of knowledge sharing, giving behavior and appreciative inquiry attracted our interest

the most. Therefore, the thesis centers on these topics. We are mainly fascinated by the research of psychologist Adam Grant on giving behavior, so we decided to focus on his theories in discussing the theme. Furthermore, the research incorporates other theory from both the business realm and the world of sports. Research from the social entrepreneurship professor David Cooperrider strongly informed our engagement with appreciative inquiry. Believing that working in teams will become more and more common at all workplaces, this research will hopefully illuminate key aspects of the topic that can be helpful for organizations and teams in various spheres. However, teams within the sports sphere comprise the main audience of the research.

The final topic quickly arose when we spoke with Paco for the first time. He was explaining the NFF's three values, and his focus on these values was obvious. Hence, we decided to examine value-based leadership. Our first conversations with the players revealed that the team prioritizes the two values of *råskap* and *unity*. Values are often promoted as something important for teams and organizations, which is supposed to have a positive effect on the behavior of the group (Schaubroeck, Lam and Cha, 2007). However, the American expert on team management, Patrick Lencioni (2002, p.113), has argued that value statements often “*are bland, toothless, or just plain dishonest*”. He has stated that values often end up in being empty statements that are destructive for the team, as they are implemented in a poor way. We had personally witnessed how the promotion of values could be important for teams and organizations; however, we had never observed a direct effect on the results of a group and were skeptical of the influence of the values on the team's performance. We had more frequently experienced values as words on a piece of paper rather than tools that yields great results. However, we recognized that this team had dedicated an unusual amount of time to team building and *råskap* and we were curious about the possible effects the sessions had on the team's success.

1.3 Research question

The main purpose of this study is to explore the off-pitch success factors of Norway U20, which also contribute to success on the pitch. After conducting our first interviews, we noticed that the leadership and the role of the coach seemed to contribute substantially to the team's success. Hence, we formulated the research

question around this topic. We aimed to examine whether giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and value-based leadership could explain some parts of the success of Norway U20. To this end, we performed research on these topics from a leadership perspective that takes into account the leadership between the leaders and players as well as leadership between players within the group.

The research question is as follows:

What characterizes the leadership practices within the Norway U20 team?

To answer this question, we identified three supplementary topics within the leadership practices to examine more closely:

1. *Giving behavior*
2. *Appreciative inquiry*
3. *Value-based leadership*

Many theories are relevant to the leadership practices within Norway U20. However, based on early interviews and observations as well as our own interests, we decided to focus on these three theories. Each is highly interesting and investigating them in combination could reveal their contributions to the success of Norway U20.

PART II: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

Establishing the theoretical background of the research was a laborious process, as numerous theoretical approaches were relevant to include. However, as mentioned in the introduction, we decided on the leadership practice theories of horizontal and vertical leadership, giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and value-based leadership. These choices are justified by their applicability to the success of Norway U20 and the team's leadership practices. Naturally, we could have approached the theory from a hierarchical point of view by admitting that some parts may be more important than others. However, after conducting early interviews and observations, we concluded that these theories supplement each other. Therefore, we decided to emphasize them equally in our research.

2.2 Leadership practices

Defining leadership is a challenge. Nahavandi (2006, p.25) has defined a leader as *“any person who influences individuals and groups within an organization, helps them establish goals, and guides them toward achievement of those goals, thereby allowing them to be effective.”* Several researchers have stated that leadership is usually regarded as the most critical factor for success or failure in a team (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Carson, Tesluk & Marrone, 2007). Meanwhile, Bass and Stogdill (1990, p.20) have argued that the definition of leadership depends on its purposes. They have presented one definition of leadership as *“the interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems or to attain goals.”* In view of these definitions, we argue that leadership occurs not only between the coach and the team but also between team members.

2.2.1 Five leadership practices

Leadership practices refer to various methods of leadership that leaders can use when guiding their followers. To answer our research question, we apply theories from Kouzes and Posner (2003; 2014), who have identified the following five leadership practices for exemplary leadership.

Modelling the way: The best way to earn the necessary respect as a leader is to practice behaviors that the followers respect. Leaders must live what they preach. Kouzes and Posner (2014) have emphasized that leading by example is the most effective way to demonstrate integrity. By not only devising values and guiding principles but also practicing them in real life, a leader can become more efficient.

Inspiring a shared vision: Inspiring a shared vision involves getting everyone on board. A leader must convince his or her followers to share his or her dream. Connecting their dreams into a collective vision encourages followers to “*commit their talents, time, and energy to working together to achieve greatness*” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p.3).

Challenging the process: It is dangerous for a leader or an organization to accept the status quo. A focus on innovation, out-of-the-box thinking and a culture that accepts learning from failure encourages the continuous growth of a group. This leadership practice emphasizes the importance of stepping out of the comfort zone to achieve a greater outcome (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

Enabling others to act: Leaders desire to elicit the best from their followers. “*When leaders involve others in decision making and goal setting, and build teams with spirit, cohesion, and a true sense of community, they make it possible for teamwork, trust, and empowerment to flourish*” (Kouzes & Posner, 2014, p. 5). Thereby, they can create a team spirit that helps the group accomplish a superior result together compared to as individuals.

Encouraging the hearts: By encouraging the hearts of followers, leaders can ensure that everyone understands that their actions truly matter. This encouragement can be delivered through appreciation of the followers for “who they are” rather than “what they do.” It is vital for leaders to notice and acknowledge the victories of individuals as well as those of the group (Kouzes & Posner, 2014).

The present research focuses on these five practices. We searched for stories and examples of applications of these practices in various settings that are directly or closely related to Norway U20. In addition, we attempted to combine these practices with aspects of giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and value-based leadership.

2.2.2 Balancing horizontal and vertical leadership

Another impression from the first interviews was that the leadership had changed from a vertical to a more horizontal style after the arrival of the new coach in 2017. A horizontal approach to leading emphasizes equality, whereas a vertical leadership strategy involves hierarchy (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In regard to balancing vertical and horizontal leadership in projects, such as the ongoing project of Norway U20, Müller, Sankaran, Drouin, Vaagaasar, Bekker and Jain (2018) have outlined a cycle of five events (see Figure 1):

1. The **nomination** of team members to the project, wherein the project manager can, if permitted, influence the choice of potential candidates.
2. **Identification** of possible horizontal leaders among the team members for specific situations and working areas.
3. **Selection** of horizontal leaders, whereby the vertical leader uses empowerment to allow the horizontal leader to start his or her leadership.
4. **Horizontal leadership and its governance**, by which the horizontal leader executes his or her leadership with the support of the vertical leader (Pilkienė, Alonderienė, Chmieliauskas, Šimkonis & Müller, 2018).
5. **Transition**, when the leadership shifts back to the vertical leader or to another team member.

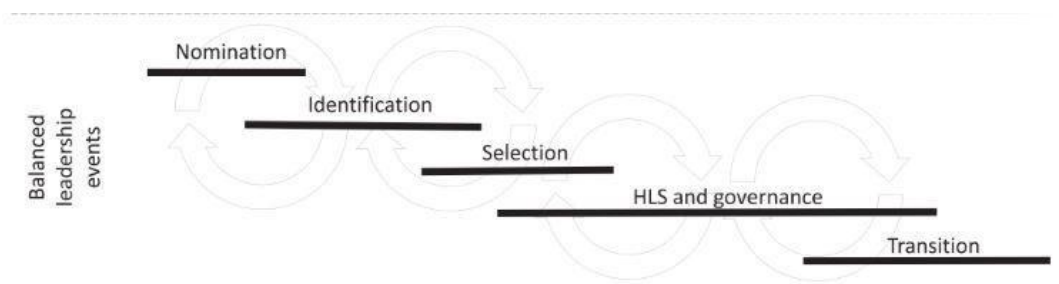


Figure 1: Balanced leadership events (Müller et al., 2018)

In early interviews, some players stated that they felt that their opinions mattered, which suggested that the balance between vertical and horizontal leadership might have affected the project ownership of both the staff and the players. They shared that they received more responsibilities and were included in dialogues, so we aimed to explore these elements in our study. By applying the five events of Müller et al. (2018), we assessed the vertical-horizontal balance in the leadership of the team.

2.3 Giving behavior

Examples of giving behavior include donating to charity or assisting a stranger on the street. It is often called prosocial behavior and also encompasses helping, giving and volunteering (Grant & Dutton, 2012). However, there are a myriad of ways to help others and no definite criteria for giving behavior. Grant (2013b) has described giving behavior as “*the willingness to help others achieve their goals*” and underlined that it is essential for effective collaboration. We perceive effective collaboration to be essential for the success of a national team; thus, we considered this theory to be relevant to explain the research findings. This thesis limits the scope of the term to in-group giving behavior, which consists of a willingness to share information, values, experiences and solutions with other members on one’s team. The research concentrates on giving behavior among teammates who also qualify as competitors by vying for the same position on the field, as our preliminary research revealed that they viewed video clips together and shared their knowledge with each other.

2.3.1 Givers, takers and matchers

According to Grant (2013a), employees tend to behave with either a giving or a taking behavior. The type may change from day to day or based on the setting. Employees make the decision themselves to either take or give. Grant (2013a) has described people with a giving behavior as other-oriented and therefore prone to giving more than they receive in return. In addition, they may offer assistance or share their knowledge. In contrast, those who practice a taking behavior are generally more self-oriented and thus take more from others than they give back.

Research has reported that giving behavior in organizations led to multiple benefits, including effective collaboration, innovation, efficiency, productivity and quality improvement (Grant, 2013b). According to Grant (2013b), the benefits of giving behavior have been verified by a meta-analysis by Nathan Podsakoff, who has stated that the connection between employee giving and desirable business outcomes is surprisingly robust. In the present case, it is imperative to examine the giving behavior in a sports setting and identify similarities and differences in relation to Grant’s (2013b) findings in the business world.

The results of giving behavior are less predictable for individuals than for organizations. When having a giving behavior, one tends to either end up as the lowest-performing employee or the most successful one (Flynn, referenced in Grant, 2013b). People with a taking behavior often end up in the middle section. According to Grant (2013b), those with a giving behavior might struggle with distinguishing generosity from other attributes, such as availability, empathy and timidity. Managers can resolve this challenge by helping their giving-oriented employees understand the importance of self-advocacy – or, at least, of knowing how to assert themselves. It may also be prudent to establish limitations regarding when, how and whom to help to prevent burnout due to continuous availability. Grant (2013b) has highlighted the necessity to ask others for help and not only help others. The most highly performing givers tend to be open to both helping others and receiving help themselves. Grant (2013a; 2013b) has also delineated another type of person: the matcher. Someone with a matching behavior will not always help out and will instead hold those with a taking behavior accountable for their actions. Matchers only offer assistance if the takers help the matchers or someone else in return (Grant, 2013a). Our research mainly focuses on the group results of giving behavior; however, these group results also imply some individual results – whether positive or negative – among the participants. Thus, we considered giving behavior at both the individual and group levels of the team. Early findings suggested a strong culture of giving behavior in the team. We wanted to determine if all of the team members benefitted from this culture or if some of the givers lose out in the sports context as well. It is vital to consider how the management of Norway U20 ensures that everyone benefits from the culture that they create.

2.3.2 Giving behavior and knowledge sharing in sports

Knowledge can consist of “*facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education*” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). It may also be interpreted as a person’s true beliefs and could become a sustainable competitive advantage that managers and teams can use together to generate value for the company (von Krogh, 1998). Mesmer-Magnus and DeChurch (2009) have decisively concluded the positive effects of information sharing in teams and argued that the outcomes of information sharing are indisputable. However, teams tend to fail in information sharing when it is most critical. Von Krogh (1998) has argued that “*the initial sharing of knowledge, experiences, and practices among team members*” is an

important phase for the creation of new common knowledge within the team. The process of knowledge sharing could be fragile, as it requires each participant to expose his or her own true beliefs, and some people might struggle to be totally honest when sharing knowledge. This assumption is also supported by Grant's theory (2013a) on givers, takers and matchers, which dictates that some people need to know that they will receive something in return before they will decide to share their knowledge. The relationship between the participants in a group that engages in knowledge sharing is critical for the efficiency of the activity (von Krogh, 1998). Unfair and selfish factors, such as untrustworthy behavior, constant competition and imbalances in giving and receiving information, threaten the effectiveness of knowledge sharing (von Krogh, 1998). In view of this, von Krogh (1998) has proposed that people who care for each other in a group also tend to trust each other. This trust in turn leads to a state of mutuality wherein people bestow knowledge upon each other and are inclined to share their insights with colleagues. Carmeli, Brueller and Dutton (2009) have referenced Miller and Stiver (1997) in defining mutuality as a shared activity in which all those involved are "*participating as fully as possible.*" Therefore, Carmeli et al. (2009) have argued that mutuality fosters safety through stronger mutual empathy between participants. The importance of safety is also a focus of Harvard professor Amy Edmondson (1999), who has posited that psychological safety in a team enhances the interpersonal trust and mutual respect for team members, which allows people to feel comfortable being themselves. Thus, participants who care for each other might contribute to an environment that promotes mutuality, which in turn facilitates effective knowledge sharing.

In research on prosocial and antisocial behavior in sports, Kavussanu and Boardley (2009) have differentiated two types of prosocial behavior and knowledge sharing: *acts toward teammates* and *acts toward opponents*. The former among sport athletes has a clearly beneficial effect on both the team and the actor, even if the behavior is motivated by selfish reasons. Meanwhile, a benevolent act toward an opponent does not seem to directly benefit the actor and is more likely to derive from an unselfish concern for another person. The present research investigates team sports in the context of a team in which the contenders are both teammates and competitors, as they fight for the same positions on the football field. The degree of honesty in the giving behavior might differ when sharing knowledge with

a competitor versus with a teammate. This dilemma provoked our curiosity. Our first impression from the preliminary interviews was that the players shared knowledge with each other without consideration of this issue. However, it was difficult to believe that their answers were wholly authentic, so we aimed to examine the issue in more depth.

2.4 Appreciative inquiry

This section presents the theory of appreciative inquiry and highlights aspects of the theory that are especially relevant to this research. The verb *appreciate* means “*to recognize the good qualities of somebody/something*” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2019). To refine this explanation, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, p.8) have explained that “*appreciative inquiry is the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them.*” The appreciative inquiry approach challenges the traditional change management theory. Analyses of this change have tended to focus more on the problem and trying to find a solution to it. Thus, the primary concerns are what is wrong and how one can fix those problems (Hammond, 2013; Fitzgerald, Murrell & Newman, 2001). On this basis, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) has challenged the traditional approach to change management by integrating a more positive perspective of change.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, p.7) have provided a more thorough explanation of the two words that create the term “appreciative inquiry” by clarifying that “appreciative” characterizes “*the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us*” and centers on affirming strengths, successes and potentials, while “inquire” has two interpretations: “*1. The act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.*” Hammond (2013) has further explained that analyzing the change through the lens of appreciative inquiry searches for points of success in an organization and what we can appreciate about it. One reason for writing our thesis on Norway U20 is that we noticed their ability to repeatedly achieve great comebacks. Consequently, we wonder if their previous successes helped them in reaching their new goals. In view of this insight, it is logical to apply appreciative inquiry theories to derive findings.

According to Hammond (2013), the appreciative approach should not be interpreted as a refusal to take negative news into consideration. It cannot be mistaken for an

uncritical approach. Rather, according to Elliot (1999, p.10), it entails “*choosing the elements of a situation that we want to work with; it is not about a pollyannaish refusal to recognize the fact that good and not-so-good are mixed in unequal proportions in everything we experience.*”

2.4.1 The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry

The 4-D model is closely linked to the assumption of appreciative inquiry that “*organizing is a possibility to be embraced*” (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2006). The model conceptualizes the underlying principles of appreciative inquiry (i.e. constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory and positive) as a four-phase cycle of *discovery*, *dream*, *design* and *delivery* (Fitzgerald, Murrell & Miller, 2003). The model is circular because it represents a dynamic process of continuously learning more about success factors (Hammond, 2013). We chose to use the 4-D model as the framework of our discussion because it is practical and easy transferable. Moreover, it is a suitable tool for determining how the NFF can re-create and transfer the success of Norway U20 to other national teams.

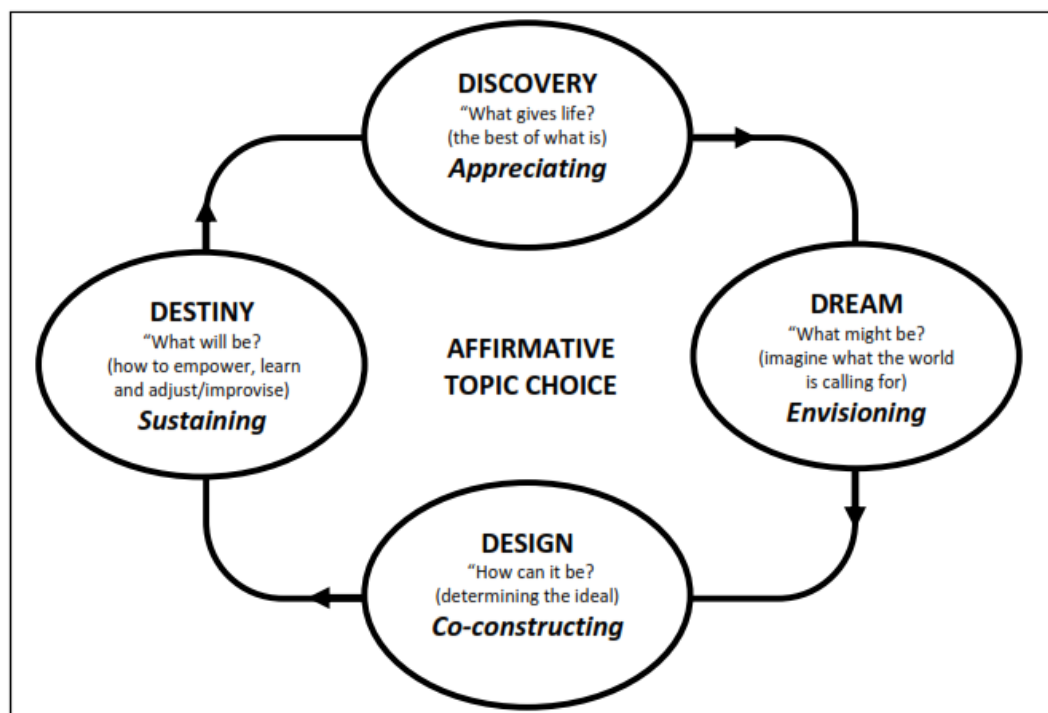


Figure 2: The 4-D model in appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003 p.83).

Discovery: The purpose of this phase is to identify and elaborate on factors that can identify the best of *what is*. Whitney (1998 p.317) has referred to a claim that she considers a common myth: that we learn from our mistakes. All we can learn from our mistakes is what we do not want to do again in the same situation. Thus, the discovery phase shifts the focus away from the measures that are not working well

toward those that are effective and may work in the future (Cooperrider & Whitney 2003; Whitney 1998). Thus, the phase identifies the best of the topic that is being defined or chosen and then reveals the experiences of each individual in regard to how they have contributed to making a difference (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2001).

Dream: The main goal in this phase is to reveal common themes from the discovery phase to determine the circumstances under which the group performed well. These themes can indicate possibilities for the collective future. (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Therefore, the dream phase challenges the current status of the group by encouraging all members visualize a different, more valuable future and daring them to dream of the organization's most positive potential. This is accomplished by linking to the best of *what is* (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003; Whitney, 1998). In the dream phase, the intention is to connect the discovery phase and the dream phase by combining the best of *what is* with one's own perceptions of *what might be*. Such provocative proposition can, at its most impactful, transmit a powerful energy to all members that can make the vision a reality and empower them to take risks, confront the known and share a mutual vision (Whitney, 1998).

Design: The *design* phase diverges from the two previous *discovery* and *dream* phases. The purpose is to start composing directions and appreciative systems that support the group in achieving their dream for the future (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Hammond (2013) has also mentioned *provocative propositions*, which typically ask, "*how can we do what we dreamed?*" (Hammond, 2013, p.30). In addition, according to Bushe (2012), "*participants are asked to imagine their group, organization or community at its best and an attempt is made to identify the common aspirations of system members and to symbolize this in some way.*" The members and stakeholders in the organization then craft actions to support the propositions from the dream phase.

Destiny: The last phase which was initially called the delivery phase was retitled as the destiny phase by Cooperrider and Whitney because, in their opinion, the word delivery suggested images of traditional change management implementation (Bushe, 2012). In this phase, the different systems and structures that were revealed

in the *design* phase are implemented in a positive feedback loop of appreciative learning. New people will come and enter the system and by having implemented this appreciative process, these new people will learn from others and the positive and appreciative mentality will continue (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003).

2.5 Value-based leadership

Values can be defined as “*principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life*” (Oxford dictionaries, 2019). In regard to this definition, Adam Grant (2016) has cited that values are one of the most critical factors for building quality in a business. Furthermore, Fry (2003) has referred to several scholars who have explained value-based leadership as a leadership style that is based on shared and strongly internalized values and in which the leader advocates and acts upon these values. In articulating a vision for a better future, these scholars have demonstrated that value-based leaders are able to enliven extraordinary follower commitment, motivation and performance by appealing to subordinates’ values. Appealing to these values enhances subordinates’ self-efficacy and thereby makes their self-esteem contingent on their contribution to the leader’s mission and shared vision (Fry, 2003). Schaubroeck et al., (2007) has written that values can have impact on cognitions, emotions and behavior. Kraemer (2011) has also highlighted the importance of values by explaining that they define the organizational culture by setting the tone for every interaction. Furthermore, he has explained that companies struggle to handle problems and challenges as well as to be creative if they do not have clearly defined values. Without values, boundaries in the company may be lacking, which could cause them to easily succumb to ethical breaches.

In view of the above explanations, Snyder, Hedlund, Ingelsson and Bäckström (2017, p.485) have referred to several studies indicating that initiatives in quality management often fail because “*the leaders do not take time to build a culture of engagement and innovation in which values are a core component.*” Fry (2003) has also discussed empirical evidence from over 50 studies that have demonstrated powerful effects of the behavior of value-based leaders on the motivation of the followers and the work unit’s performance. In this regard, Prilleltensky (2000, p.144) has explained, “*values are not only beneficial in that they guide behaviour*

toward a future outcome, for they also have intrinsic merit.” Thus, by including values when leading a company, team or group, leaders promote both collective and personal well-being. Moreover, it can be used to enhance both performance and motivation among the subordinates or team members. As mentioned in the introduction, the NFF has defined three values: *unity*, *råskap* and *pride*. In our paper, we believe it is essential to consider how these values were implemented and enacted to create engagement and motivation among the players.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) have recommended more attention to understanding culture and the role of values in leadership. They have argued that leaders must become more aware of building a resonant culture. Such a culture requires a strong common core in the form of shared values. Given the importance of values for building an organizational culture, Snyder, Ingelsson and Bäckström (2018) have highlighted that methods from design thinking and innovation can be supportive in understanding organizational culture and developing a climate of participation. One can combine these methods with Miles’ (2015, p.681) statement that “*values are motivating and applicable across situations, thereby making them important for action.*” This claim has also been underlined by Aadland (2010) in explaining that values are instruments for enhancing the desired performance. Thus, values can be regarded as the origin of action. However, in another study, Aadland (2004) has noted that a key challenge regarding values is the work of how to realize them. He has described a sequence of actions for working with values wherein a main step is to set the values into action. Gehman, Treviño and Garud (2013) have made the same suggestion by referring to several scholars who have adopted a more dynamic and performative focus on values whereby the values appear in the performance. With such a focus, one must be understanding of what is of value and how values are made recognizable by examining the practices by which values are performed. In view of the explanations above, it is notable that value-based leadership is not a leadership style that functions alone. Rather, according to Beyer (2006), it can supplement other systems by creating a dialogue about values and behavior on the one hand and goals and action plans on the other. Therefore, in combination with our other theoretical topics, value-based leadership is essential to include in our study to more precisely explain the team's success.

PART III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

When starting an empirical inquiry, it is important to find out what methodological approach that is most appropriate to use. In this section we first present our methodological approach, before we outline our research method, explaining the choice of a qualitative approach. Furthermore, we present the quality of the collected data through discussing its validity and reliability. Lastly, we present how we collected our data, followed up by ethical considerations.

3.2 Abductive inquiry

When organizational researchers begin an empirical inquiry, they must make choices regarding the underlying inquiry of their research as well as the ontology and epistemology (Martela, 2012). Moreover, when selecting a method design, the decision is often between inductive and deductive forms of reasoning. Inductive reasoning is a primary form of reasoning in scientific practice as well as everyday life (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). According to Ketokivi and Mantere (2010, p. 330), inductive reasoning “*is an amplified form of reasoning in that the conclusion is more than a restatement of the premises.*” Meanwhile, in deductive reasoning, the conclusion is derived on the basis of a set of premises. Therefore, the conclusion does not contain any new knowledge, as it is merely a restatement of the premises (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

As an extension of the explanations above about induction and deduction, the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce has devised a new term called *abduction* (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The term originates from the Latin etymology and suggests leading the way. With this term, Peirce has argued that people follow a distinct form of reasoning when seeking explanations (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). In addition, Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p.170) have explained that “*in the context of research, abduction refers to an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence.*” They have also specified that abduction is distinct from induction and deduction because of its logical form.

When examining the characteristics of the leadership practices in Norway U20, we apply the logic of an abductive inquiry. We created hypotheses at the beginning of the research process but were aware of that they could change in response to surprising findings of new evidence. For example, based on information from our first interviews, we recognized a need to further probe the role and behavior of the head coach than we had initially expected, as many of the interview objects highlighted his leadership skills as a decisive part of the team's success.

3.3 Research method

We decided to use a qualitative research method with semi-structured interviews. According to Yin (2010), a qualitative research method is a suitable choice for studying a real-world setting to determine how people cope and thrive. This description fits closely with our research, and we believe that a qualitative research method is the most compatible choice. To achieve the desired research depth and gather as much relevant information as we needed, we interviewed both staff and players of the U20 national team. We met with all of the participants in person to facilitate follow-up and control questions. We employed a case-based research approach whereby we aimed to listen to the *narratives* of our interview subjects (Morgan & Dennehy, 1997; Bell, 1992). Our questions related mainly to leadership; however, to collect sufficient data, it was also necessary to include questions regarding other aspects of giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and values. We specifically requested stories from within the team, which is valuable for understanding which factors might have contributed to the team's success (for interview guides, see Appendices 1 and 2).

We observed the team during one of their national team gatherings, which allowed us to function as a *total researcher*, which, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), entails observation without any involvement. Thus, we did not participate in the flow of events in any way. The observation was unstructured in the sense that we did not have any predetermined notions of different behaviors that we would witness (Mulhall, 2003). It allowed us to develop a broader perspective of the interactions among team members and compare their actions with their statements. The ability to perform both observations and interviews also provided the possibility of asking about instances that we observed and thereby validating the observations (Martela, 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that we

were only able to conduct one observation of the team. If we were to fully utilize the observations, we would probably have needed to conduct several observations over time to examine development among the players and staff.

3.3.1 Quality of the data

To ensure the quality of research and trustworthy results, it is imperative to conduct the study in a systematic, rigorous and ethical manner (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To explain the quality of our research, we present the terms “validity” and “reliability” and proceed through specific examples to illustrate how we managed to apprehend the quality.

Validity

Validity relates to concerns about the interpretation of observations (Silverman, 2016). Leung (2015) has highlighted that validity in qualitative research can refer to the “*appropriateness of the tools, process and data.*” Creswell and Miller (2000) have combined these two explanations in their understanding of validity. In their article, they have suggested that validity indicates whether the study’s findings are true and precise from not only the researcher’s point of view but also the perspective of the participants and readers. Fangen (2010) has similarly emphasized the importance of asking whether one is truly mapping the phenomenon that one wants to research and if the findings reflect the reality and the purpose of the study.

In our research, we took several steps to achieve the highest validity of our collected data. Through epistemological validity, which regards the durability of the creation and declaration of knowledge, we accounted for various epistemological criteria, such as adapting to theory, an understandable purpose, credibility and logical reflections (Fangen, 2010). Throughout the data collection process, we reflected heavily on our observations during interviews and meetings with the group of players, and we tried to systemize these observations together with interviews in multiple logical categories. Furthermore, we used a range of theories that we believe to be highly relevant to illustrating our research question. All of the interviewees were given the opportunity to read through the transcript of their interview, which was a measure to strengthen the epistemological validity. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), it is important for the findings to be controlled and validated as

much as possible. Therefore, justifying all of the interpretations that are made in the discussion yields more valid results.

Reliability

Reliability is another concept for ensuring the quality of research. According to Thagaard (2009), reliability addresses the question of whether the research was carried out in a trustworthy and reliable manner. This concept further connects to the explanation of reliability from Johannesen, Tufte and Kristoffersen (2005, p. 198), which states that “*reliability is linked to the survey data: which data is used, the way they are collected and how they are processed.*” In our research, the interviews with players, the head coach and the staff formed the basis of our data. With the use of an interview method, the reliability is highly dependent on the abilities of the interviewer and observer when it comes to expressing themselves accurately and correctly (Patel & Davidson, 1995). Halvorsen (2008) has further specified that one can ask about an aspect twice during the interview to ensure reliability. During our interviews, we asked if our interpretations of certain answers were correct, and we received confirmation. This measure enhanced the reliability of our data. As a sign of the reliability of our results, we noticed throughout our interviews that the stories were told in consistent ways in terms of how participants understood and experienced the developments of the team in the last few years. This consistency is another indication that our data are highly reliable.

3.4 Data collection

We performed interviews with 10 interviewees. To obtain the necessary breadth and to obtain proper results, we interviewed players, the coach and some of the staff. We specifically interviewed players who had been part of the team throughout the whole period as well as players who had only recently joined the team. We also intentionally interviewed both permanent starters on the team and players who often start on the bench. We started our interview process with a context-based interview with the head coach, Paco (see Figure 3). This step was critical to establish more context for the history of the team and construct a more relevant interview guide prior to conducting the interviews with the players. We interviewed some of the players early in the process and some later, but all interviews were conducted between January and March. The staff were also interviewed during the same period. After analyzing and transcribing the interviews with the players and staff,

we conducted a final depth interview with Paco to clarify the overall situation and examine our findings further.



Figure 3: Timeline for interviews

In the semi-structured interviews, we had a clear set of instructions, which “*can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data*” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). All of the interviews were held in person and employed mostly the same questions. However, we allowed the interviewees to make digressions that imparted a broader understanding of their stories. We also believed it was smart to have the opportunity to further probe one specific theme if it was relevant at some point in the interviews. In the end of each interview, we posed an open question to ask the subjects if they had any additional information to contribute, which ensured that we did not miss out on important data. Most interviewees were interviewed once, but we had the opportunity to re-establish contact with them if we needed more information.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Participation in this research was completely voluntary. The data that were collected from the participants were confidential, and the participants were promised anonymity. A relevant aspect to discuss is the extent to which we were able to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees. The group of players and staff is small, so completely guaranteeing their anonymity is difficult. We decided to assign fictive male names to all of the participants, as well as referring to them as player/staff only, with no other revealing information, to maintain as much anonymity as possible. However, the head coach cannot be made anonymous, as the team has only one head coach. Prior to the interviews, the participants signed a consent form that explained their right to withdraw from the project at any time

during the research period (see Appendix 3 for the consent form). None of the participants decided to withdraw from the research. The project was submitted to the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD), and all of the audiotapes and transcriptions will be deleted in line with the NSD's guidelines.

PART IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Through our interviews, we were told numerous stories of how and why this team has managed to accomplish success. However, we had to consider which topics we argue as most important when it comes to the leadership of Norway U20 and the success they have had. This chapter presents findings that relate to our research topics of leadership practices, giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and value-based leadership.

4.2 “The conductor who lets people play solo”

Everything starts with a coach who knows how he wants things to be, who also lets people take responsibility in areas where they can add something. That may be both staff and players. He is a strong leader, a clear leader, but also a warm and caring leader. He is curious about new things all the time, and he makes us feel important. I also think the players feel important. Even if they do not get to play, they get player conversations and are followed up, so that they feel important. It creates an atmosphere where people let go and are honest. He is like a conductor who lets people play solo. [Håvard, staff member]

He is enormous - even though he is very good at things himself - he is great at taking advantage of the competency among others inside of his team and understands what is best for the group. [Egil, staff member]

Although Paco seemed to be a strong leader who knew what he wanted and how to achieve it, a major finding of our research concerned his ability to include others in his leadership. He did not seem scared to let other people flourish (Kouzes & Posner, 2014); on the contrary, he actively wanted them to flourish. He included his staff in the decision making, and they were free to make their own choices, which may increase the efficiency of the leadership (Nahavandi, 2006). Hence, we argue that despite the hierarchy (wherein Paco is on top and his staff is beneath him in the power structure), the leadership style in Norway U20 is not only vertical but possesses horizontal traits as well (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The quotes above are only two of many descriptions of how Paco cares for those around him and understands the importance of eliciting their best efforts.

4.2.1 Responsibility and trust from the beginning

One example of leadership in Norway U20 was shared by a key member of Paco’s staff from the first training sessions with this team. Håvard worked with Paco earlier, so he knew what to expect when he accepted a role in the team. Still, he

described his first days in Paco's staff as both exciting and surprising. He felt appreciated from the first day, as Paco recognized and appreciated his strengths as a coach and let him take charge of some parts of the trainings within given limits. He explained that he had never received so much responsibility at such an early stage before. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) have emphasized the importance of appreciating each other's strengths. Paco's approach of allowing Håvard to take control reflects that he appreciated Håvard's strengths. Kouzes and Posner (2014) have highlighted the importance of having a balance between vertical and horizontal leadership. This balance seems to be attended in this setting, as Håvard was encouraged to take the lead, albeit within given limits.

Early on, I got to know what my tasks would be, and he explained why he wanted exactly me for that particular job. He made me feel that I was his choice from day one. He chose me and had 100% trust in what I knew. I almost felt that he wanted to learn from me - I got that kind of feeling. Looking back at it now, it made you think that "Wow, am I? Shall I?" ... You feel appreciated even before you have started working. He had a very clear structure, stating that "*I want our play to look like this and this, but within these limits, you are free to create your own dynamics.*" This triggered me. And that was how it was, already from the first training session. Very often, a trainer does everything himself, and is afraid of letting others take control. Then, after a long time, when he knows he can trust you, you are allowed to take over. But here, it was different from the first session. He was like, "*you have those guys – go ahead.*" For me, this is very satisfying. I liked getting that kind of responsibility. It was a bit out of the comfort zone, but I liked it... Through this, I got to know the players on a whole other level. And this is the same for other people on the team. [Håvard, staff member]

This description by Håvard conveys the impression of a leader who delegates responsibility – and requirements – from the beginning. He made others feel appreciated by encouraging his staff to take the lead in different settings. However, he also functioned as a vertical leader by delivering clear messages and setting limits to suit his aims. Another person on the coaching staff reinforced these impressions. Egil's involvement started when he was completing a master's degree and wanted to conduct research on the team. When he approached the coach, he was surprised by Paco's reaction. Paco was enthusiastic about the research and wanted to contribute; however, he had several strict demands in exchange for helping Egil with the study.

I originally joined because of a master's degree on self-regulation. I asked to do my study on two national teams. Paco was interested but said that – and this is very typical of him – if they were to do this, this topic had to be the focus the whole day. He wanted me to start with a lecture. My focus was "*from talent to top athlete.*" After the lecture, I could do my research. He also said that I had to be available for the players throughout the day, in case they wanted to talk to me. So that is how it all started. It turned out that many of the players were curious about this, and Paco meant that it was a need for this. Hence, I joined the next time they were gathered as well, and from that day on I have been part of the team. [Egil, staff member]

Paco shared that it was natural for him to let his staff flourish from the first day while also making high demands. He emphasized that it would be impossible for him to deliver positive results if the team did not fulfill his expectations.

You have to recruit people who are better than yourself and let them do their stuff. Leadership is about letting go. That is what often is very hard. It is about people development. [Paco, head coach]

The process of hiring the right people for this team lasted about two months. After accepting the job in January, Paco had until March to prepare for the first gathering with his chosen players. During his nomination period, he had time to find suitable people for the roles in his staff (Müller et al., 2018). The head coach explained that it was important for him to identify and locate people with abilities that complement his own, which Müller et al. (2018) have argued that is the most effective way to assemble a team of leaders. However, Paco argued that the people he chose needed to be self-driven and with a winning mentality. He considered two to three candidates for each role and travelled all over Norway to interview the candidates and meet them face to face.

I am careful about who I recruit. They have to be self-propelled and self-motivated. They also have to take the blame when they do something bad. And this is how my team is. They are the ones meeting the players face to face. They have the most meetings. I needed a complementary team. I did not want people who are similar to me. They must be like me, when it comes to wishing to develop and what they believe in, but their personality traits cannot be the same as mine. I travelled all over Norway to find those that I wanted to work with. I think this process is very underestimated. [Paco, head coach]

The backgrounds of the staff members were highly diverse, and Paco's knowledge of each of them differed. He noted that he knew some of them before he hired them because they were former colleagues and someone he had trained. Others were total strangers before they were hired to work with this team. Paco described his staff as a group of people with different strengths who very much get along. He said that his staff has many exciting qualities. Some are "systematics," while others are the type to offer "a shoulder to cry on." Allowing his staff to unfold their strengths is a leadership strategy that may enhance creativity and innovation among his staff (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Hammond, 2013).

We know about these differences and we have had many social gatherings, securing that we know each other well. The level of respect in our group is very high. We are allowed to have fun, but at the same time work very seriously. I believe us being aware of the differences and the defined working tasks, combined with our ownership to this project is important. [Håvard, staff member]

The unique combination of abilities and strengths that Paco recognizes in his staff also seems to be well communicated to them. As Håvard's statement reveals, the staff members emphasized the composition of people as much as Paco did.

After Paco was certain that he had hired the right people for his staff, he stressed the importance of taking advantage of the different strengths in his team. The coach referred to Maxwell's five levels of leadership (Maxwell, 2003) in explaining how he had the confidence to let others flourish in their skills and abilities.

That is from level four in Maxwell's theories. I tried to reach that level already on our first gathering. It is about people development. I needed to know them, then show them that I had the skills required, and so I would let them do what they wanted. [Paco, head coach]

In Maxwell's theory, level one concerns position, while level two relates to the people who follow a leader because of their relationship to him or her. At level three, people follow a leader based on his or her accomplishments (Maxwell, 2003). Paco felt that he had quickly passed the three first levels and was therefore confident in progressing further into level four, where people follow a leader because of what he or she has achieved for them.

The importance of acting like and knowing that he is the leader while also surrendering responsibility in certain areas was a key emphasis in the staff's descriptions of Paco's leadership of Norway U20.

He is very good at including, but he is also very clear on how he wants it. He is the leader. He has the last saying. And that is how it is supposed to be. However, he is good at listening and he is good at sharing, so that we know what is going on. And ultimately, he is good at challenging. He is very good at letting others flourish. I believe we all do a great job, but he is very good at acknowledging it. He does not take the credit himself, even though he is the main reason for the success. That creates a motivation inside of me. I can come up with something, then he has some responses and together we decide how to do things. He leads the process, but I get ownership to the processes, because he dares to trust that I have the competency needed. [Egil, staff member]

He has a very clear approach to how we are supposed to play, but he is always open for feedback. He is always clear on what he agrees on and what he disagrees on. This makes it easy for us. However, no questions are too stupid to be asked. He thinks and we think, reflect and discuss together, before we make a decision. Hence, you always feel like you can come with suggestions, create a change, challenge his opinions and create new dynamics, which creates a healthy climate. We have different areas of responsibility, but like today, we have had 24 player conversations, where we sit together, listen to the players and it is not only Paco that speaks. It is the whole team. In that way, we take ownership to what the players think about, not only concerning this team, but about their general life. [Håvard, staff member]

Leading on his own while also letting others take responsibility is often a main issue in balancing a horizontal and vertical leadership style (Müller et al., 2018; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The staff described a person who challenges and motivates but never hides, which are attributes that encourage optimal performance.

In alignment with the study of Müller et al. (2018), Paco has proceeded through several phases to involve his staff in his leadership. When he first received the job, he immediately nominated potential team members who he knew would be able to act as horizontal leaders. However, with, for example, Egil, he also demonstrated willingness to include more people when needed. Paco performed a selection whereby different staff members are responsible for certain areas on the basis of their personal strengths. He emphasized the importance of his whole team and explicitly stated that it would have been impossible to reach the U20 World Cup without the efforts of his staff. He repeated this sentiment in his interviews with us, and he chose to emphasize it in a press conference when presenting his chosen 21 players for the World Cup (Madsen, 2019b). The staff dedicated approximately 10,000 hours to the team in preparing, coaching, training and planning for their success. Hence, it would have indeed been impossible to be as prepared as they were had Paco not delegated responsibility and leadership to his staff.

4.2.2 Story: the match against Germany

One particular example of how coaches were encouraged to flourish derives from a pep talk prior to the game against Germany in the second round of qualification to the Euros. Norway had just lost 6-1 to Holland and needed to beat Germany, who were a major favorite, in their next match in order to progress to the European Championship. Paco allowed Håvard to deliver the pep talk, and Håvard remembered the build up to this match particularly well.

I do not bother to hide my feelings, I sit down thinking that “this is it, it is finished, this is not going.” That is my immediate thought. Secondly, I start to go through this kind of shame process, where I feel like I have failed. Eventually, this feeling changes to a feeling of irritation and frustration, before it begins to become constructive. And then, in a blink, I suddenly become crystal clear. In that moment it is important that I have the other people from the staff with me. They tell me that everything is possible, and everything can happen. They are structured and they start looking at tables, finding out that if we can beat Germany, everything can happen. Slowly but surely, we create an atmosphere where we think that “it is not impossible. It is dark but not quite black.” In these moments, I have my strengths, and that is the same with one of the others in the staff. We were extremely sharpened and became extremely honest with the players when we were to talk to them. I still remember what I told them at the players' meeting:

"I just have to be honest and say that if you are going to be even close to having a chance to win this match, everyone here has to play the game of their lives! I am not kidding. I have seen them. Are you ashamed? I have not slept this night. I have been awake; irritated, frustrated and angry."

While telling this, I see something happening in the group. They understand what I have tried to communicate. I can see the winning instincts coming, I see that everyone goes in red and really understands the message. The atmosphere that is created strengthens the faith even more, and when I walk out from there, I think "Fuck, I liked those eyes!" The reason why Paco lets me talk to the players in that situation is because he knows that when I get in that mode, I can convey something that moves people. At the same time, he has built the whole structure on how it is actually possible to beat Germany. He has done it beforehand. What we say to the players is to look at all the possibilities that lie in front of them. Hence, they had a very clear structure, a very clear strategy that they had been working on over time in terms of how they can use it to break down Germany, and we combined it with our passion of winning. [Håvard, staff member]

By permitting Håvard to take control of the pep talk prior to the match, Paco demonstrated the ability to delegate the responsibility even in a highly important setting. As a result, Håvard delivered one of the best speeches of his life, and he managed to convey a special message to the players that day. Norway won the match against Germany 5-2, and Paco admits that allowing Håvard to shine in that moment might have been crucial for the end result.

I believe that this is the setting where Håvard is at his best, because he gets in the zone, and has a strong desire to make the players understand. I think the setting helps him to shine. [Paco, head coach]

As Paco explained, it was not a coincidence that Håvard was able to share his message with the players. The head coach was aware of the strength of his co-worker, which made it possible for him to delegate the responsibility to the right person.

4.2.3 Including the players in decisions

In our experience, the leadership in this national team included more than the staff. The players with whom we talked seemingly agreed that a change had occurred in how they were included in the leadership. Most of them emphasized three main factors in explaining their contribution to leadership: freedom, inclusion in decision making and openness to feedback. These are all key factors of horizontal leadership (Müller, et al., 2018; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

We have much more freedom now. But we are also older. We are more grown-ups now, and it is natural that we have more responsibility of getting enough food and sleep ourselves now than when we were 15 years old. The dialogue and communication between the staff and the players are much better now than what it was before this team of staff took over. Earlier, the players were united, but now I feel like the players and the staff all together are united...We can speak to the coaches about everything, and they listen to what we say. They

want to hear what we think. We have evaluation processes and conversations, and I feel like if there is something we ask them about, they act on it immediately. [Jonas, player]

Earlier, it was strict – for example, regarding going to the store. We were not allowed to do that. We were locked in. I do not think that is the best way of doing it. When you are in the Euros or in the World Cup for three weeks, you cannot just be inside a hotel room and eat hotel food. It has to be acceptable to drink one bottle of coke or eat one bag of chips, if that is something you feel like you need. I do not think that will harm your performance. If you are serious, but do that once in a while, I think it is only good for you... We often go through what is acceptable and not. And we have been part of deciding these rules. We now have a list, but it is not only the staff that decides. We are included. [Lars, player]

Before Paco and his team took over, there were strict rules about when to sleep, what to do and what not to do. The players had to follow these rules but had no influence on them. With the new head coach and staff, these restrictions changed. While there were still rules, the players felt involved in making them.

The freedom that was given to the players was especially clear during the European Championship in 2018. The event took place during hot summer days in Finland, and the players were allowed to go cycling, bathe in a lake nearby, flirt with girls, play paintball and have fun in between their matches. The Norwegians shared that players from other countries contacted them and stated that they were jealous of the freedom in Norway U20. Hans, one of the players from the captaincy team, explained that both the players and the staff decided to permit these activities. As long as they did not harm their focus on the football field, the players were allowed to have fun and create stories that they still talk about within the group.

We have a small team of captains inside of the group. If Paco is dissatisfied with something, he tells us, and we tell the other players. That makes us more responsible, and it shows that he includes us. I think it is positive for the group that the feedback comes from several different players and coaches. In Finland, during the Euros, we wondered whether an activity outside of football would give us energy or make us exhausted. Hence, Paco talked to us about it and asked what we thought. Together we decided that it would be smart to do something different, so we decided to play some paintball. We asked the group if this was something they wanted, and everyone agreed that it would be fun. I believe this was a smart choice for us. [Hans, player]

This inclusive leadership style was also evident on the pitch and during training sessions. Hans explained that he appreciated the opportunity to give feedback to the coach after a training session. He spoke of an acceptance of disagreement and a coach who listens when players ask questions or provide comments.

One thing that is always easy with Paco is to ask questions. Not all coaches are like that, and they have guidelines for when it is acceptable to ask questions. But here, if I disagree on something, I can talk to Paco about it. He might agree with me or disagree, but he always listens to what I am saying. With other coaches, a discussion might lead to a bad relationship between us, but with Paco, that is not a problem. [Hans, player]

Evidently, the players argued that they are included in the leadership of Norway U20 through dialogues and decision making. They are allowed to ask questions and felt that Paco appreciates and values them for sharing their opinions.

4.2.4 Balancing horizontal and vertical leadership

The interviews and observations reflect that the balance in the leadership style of Norway U20 is aligned with research from Müller et al. (2018). Paco explained that he has the overall responsibility, but his staff is responsible for many of the daily tasks and routines. This method of leadership is preferred for balancing horizontal and vertical leadership. Müller, Drouin and Sankaran (2018) have specified that horizontal leaders should lead the technical tasks, while the project manager should focus more on higher-level tasks. However, Paco seemed to be able to combine working from a meta perspective with the ability to connect with both his staff and his players, as all of them emphasized these abilities.

To further illustrate how the leadership of Norway U20 balances a vertical and horizontal leadership style, it is essential to consider the cycle of five events of Müller et al. (2018). When taking over as the head coach, Paco dedicated a significant amount of time to finding the best candidates for the various roles on his team. This measure fits closely with the nomination approach of Müller et al. (2018). Furthermore, enabling Håvard, Egil and many other staff members to flourish and take charge in specific situations in which they possessed considerable competence can be linked to both the *identification* and *selection* phases. The findings above imply that Paco knew that either Håvard or Egil had the right competence and skills to lead in a given situation; thus, he identified possible horizontal leaders among team members and used empowerment to encourage the leaders to commence their leadership (Müller et al., 2018). Overall, we argue that the leadership in Norway U20 is vertical with Paco on top, but it contains clear traits of horizontal leadership, as he manages to lead from both macro- and micro-perspectives and involve his co-coaches.

4.3 A team full of giving behavior

Adam Grant (2013a) has characterized giving behavior as varying between settings, as people switch between the roles of giver, taker and matcher. In view of this claim,

we were surprised by our findings on this topic during our interviews. In this group, we discovered only giving behavior among the players, which we believed to be unusual and unique. Hence, we decided to further examine their work on giving behavior to understand how they cultivated a culture in which everyone is supposed to act as a giver.

4.3.1 Knowledge sharing: cooperation with competitors

A crucial part of the evaluation and learning process for the players was to watch video clips of themselves and discuss improvements. One task that the staff assigned the players was to find some clips in which they do something good and some in which they could have acted differently. Then, the players who play in the same position on the field sat together to discuss their chosen video clips. These sessions involve players who are both teammates and competitors, as they fight for the same spot on the team. According to Kavussanu and Boardley (2009), knowledge sharing and giving behaviors toward opponents are more likely to be motivated by unselfish concern for another person than by selfish reasons. Von Krogh (1998) has emphasized that a state of mutuality is needed for optimal knowledge sharing. Our questions for the players regarded the dilemma of helping a teammate who also was an opponent: was it possible to be 100% honest in their feedback when they risked not playing in the next match because of the advice that they provided to their teammates? If so, was this a common opinion among the players?

Of course, that is a way to think about it. And maybe it was like that when we were younger. But this has always been our focus: if you put yourself above the team, you have nothing to do here. [Lars, player]

Lars seemed to agree that there could be a dilemma regarding this issue. However, both he and the other players with whom we talked to, described such dilemma as non-existent within this group. The following excerpts contain some of these answers from players.

That is not a question you get very often. But I do not feel like I have held anything back. If I am to win, I want to win because I am the best player possible. To give people advice will benefit the both of us and make both of us better. If I ask about something, I always get advice about how to do things better. I feel like that is how it is supposed to be. We are from the same nation; we love each other, and we are good friends. [Henrik, player]

I get along very well with the players playing in the same position as me. If I play, they cheer on me, and if they play, I cheer on them. I feel like we all benefit from helping each other. [Tarjei, player]

I do not feel that this is a problem in this group. As we are such a united group, we are not afraid of being honest with each other. Even though it is not the funniest thing to present something you have done badly, we learn from it. That is just how it is. [Lars, player]

We perceived a consensus among the players in regard to this dilemma and argue that there was a state of mutuality and psychological safety toward this topic in the group (von Krogh, 1998; Carmeli et al., 2009; Edmondson, 1999). In interviewing the staff about this issue, we increasingly developed the feeling that the above responses were genuine, which confirmed our impression of a safe culture in which the players can be honest with each other (Edmondson, 1999). These elements are the main ingredients for mutuality (Carmeli et al., 2009). The group had already performed these types of exercises together from the second session, and the staff discussed the importance of learning from each other and sharing knowledge. The coaches explained that they initially had to teach the players how to give responses to and learn from each other; however, over time, it has become natural for the players. The giving behavior that we examine in this research is limited to internal giving behavior, especially knowledge sharing, within this team. After conducting the interviews, we did not see reason to doubt that this behavior is common among the players. However, we do not consider whether this giving behavior is expressed in other spheres of their lives.

From a theoretical point of view, people with a giving behavior tend to be either winners or losers in a group (Flynn, referenced in Grant, 2013b). We found it interesting that this group, wherein all participants seemed to practice this behavior, has managed to achieve great results. Many of the participants highlighted collaboration as a major factor for this success. Hence, in this group, which contained only giving behavior, all participants tended to profit from this behavior, which fostered a team full of winners.

4.3.2 Role models

To more deeply investigate this topic, we considered how the team formed such a homogenous group in terms of giving behavior. One feasible explanation is that they viewed the staff as role models, and the staff highlighted the giving behavior as the right behavior. Paco, as a leader of this group, was also perceived as a giver who shared himself with the people around him. When the players surrounded themselves by the staff, they seem to be influenced by their behavior. These

assumptions correlate with anthropologist David Sloan Wilson's perception of people's behavior as subject to infection by those that surround it (2011). The following paragraphs explain how players could be influenced by Paco, other staff members, and the other players in regard to giving behavior.

Influence from Paco

Several players and staff members shared that they viewed Paco as a role model and person that they admire. One of the ways that Paco displayed a giving behavior was by dedicating his time to those around him. Hans described Paco as genuine in asking how a person is doing, which cultivates trust (Von Krogh, 1998). This feeling of trust may lead to an urge of the receiver to give back to create mutuality.

It is something about him that I cannot explain. But as soon as you start talking to him, it gives you energy. You can see how hard he works, and it is an inspiration for all of us. It makes us want to put down the same effort as him. You notice from the way he behaves that he really cares about you. There are no players on this team who have felt like they are on the outside because even if you are new, Paco involves you and shows you that you are important. [Hans, player]

Paco's ability to see and appreciate everyone for who they are was also consistently noted throughout all of the interviews. The interviewees frequently referred to an inclusive leadership whereby the head coach managed to acknowledge not only those who fulfill the main roles in the success but also their substitutes. This ability to include everyone may have had a unifying effect and encouraged more players to view Paco as a role model (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). One example of how Paco managed to see everyone occurred during the Euros in 2018. Norway had just lost to Italy in a match that they needed to win by two goals. After the loss, they were disappointed, but the Euros were not yet over. The Norwegians had only a few days until they were scheduled to play an important match against England. This match would decide which one of those two nations would qualify for the World Cup. In the build up to the match, two of the players who had not played for a single minute of the competition demonstrated extraordinary effort and a willingness to redress the situation. A few days later, Norway won the match against England and qualified for the World Cup. The two players did not play a minute of the last match either, but Paco nevertheless lifted them up by giving them prizes as *men of the match*.

The disappointment was huge, but still we were in the play off for the World Cup. It was a situation where they were disappointed, but still had three days until the most important match, where they had to be 100% focused and ready. As always, we had a training session the next day. As it had been a long tournament, it was voluntary to join the session. Who

were the two first out on the training field? Those two who had not played a minute. Giving them the prizes later on was not only about them not playing in the tournament, but the signal they sent to the group, stating that we are ready for the next challenge. That was important. And we won the game. And they did not get to play a minute. But they were the ones training that day. They managed to get past the disappointment and understood that the only option was to focus on the next task. That was my message, and that was what it was all about. It was a strong experience, seeing those two being role models for the others ahead of that game. [Paco, head coach]

I think it is noble of him to give the prizes to those two who did not play. It shows that they also do an important job, training with us and preparing us for the matches. I do not think many coaches would have thought of that idea. This describes how Paco is. He sees the person behind the player. He sees the whole group and not only those eleven who start the matches. He knows that if we are to perform as well as possible, we need everyone. I have been to other teams where this has not been the focus, and I have felt like I am not included. That would never happen with Paco as a coach. [Hans, player]

The responses to Paco's choice were entirely positive. In the interviews, several players admitted that they were surprised by Paco's choice, which made them think and appreciate their teammates even more strongly than before.

Influence of the staff

The rest of the staff may also be considered role models for the players. To facilitate a giving behavior, Paco quickly decided that the staff needed to always be ready for a challenge and never be afraid of venturing out of their comfort zone.

I believe some of this comes from the staff. One of their work tasks is to give and accept social challenges with no hesitation. During our first gathering, we had a social evening, where two guys from the staff were in charge. This time, music was the theme, and in the night before the happening, they asked everyone for their favorite songs. The next day they had found karaoke versions of these songs, and they facilitated X Factor, where everyone had to be involved. We were the judges, and they had to get up on stage pretending to hold the mic and sing, dance and make a show. I think that night was an ice breaker for many of the players. Everyone went all in, and now we have done this kind of stuff many times. Standing in front of everyone singing songs is pretty hard for some of them, but everyone has had to do it. After a session like that, where you have sung and danced in front of everyone for three minutes, sharing a video clip of your mistakes on the football field is not as dangerous anymore. [Paco, head coach]

Challenging the staff to leave their comfort zones has led to many awkward situations, such as the one presented above by Paco, wherein the staff members engaged in actions that were uncomfortable for them. Another example was a situation in which the doctor of the team had to sing the national anthem in front of journalists from all of the largest newspapers in Norway during a press conference in May 2019. Through these kinds of activities, the staff has proven to be role models in giving of themselves, which may have helped some players adapt to the giving behavior culture.

Influence of the players

The thoughts of Mr. Wilson (2011) further reveal a situation in which the players were influenced by other players. Hence, newcomers were “infected” by the already existing culture of the group and took part in the giving behavior. Karl, one of the interviewees, had only been part of the group for two gatherings when speaking to us.

We are buddies. We are like a group full of best friends. I believe that is important; that we do not look at each other as enemies. Hence, you can easily talk with the one you are competing against for a place in the starting eleven. I do not see this as a problem. Everyone makes mistakes. It is human to fail, so I am not afraid of showing my weaknesses to those I compete against. [Karl, player]

Karl’s statement projects the same view on giving behavior as that of his teammates. Thus, we argue that there seems to be at least some degree of influence on the group of players, which is also evident from other interviews.

4.3.3 Sanctioning wrong behavior

A second way to facilitate giving behavior is by sanctioning wrong behavior. Paco and his staff sanctioned players who engaged in wrong behavior. However, we also witnessed the players themselves actively rejecting bad behavior. The systematic and thorough work of Paco and his staff from day one with regard to values and norms that explain acceptable behavior has seemingly developed a certain culture within this team (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). The clearest example of their reaction to wrong behavior occurred during the last qualification to the Euros. One of the players who had not played much in the previous matches talked with the others on the bench and stated, “*I hope we lose today.*” The players who heard it did not like this comment, and they ultimately told the captain, who discussed it with the coaches. The players said that they could not have players on their team making such comments. Even if it was an offhand comment, it was not acceptable on the team. After the qualification, Paco called the players who had been involved to determine the correct story. He then travelled to meet the player who had exhibited this negative behavior to confront him in person. The player admitted to making the statement, and Paco decided to suspend him from the next call up.

Of course, we were disappointed. We were actually very close to losing that game. Paco explained in our next national team gathering that if people act like that player did, they are not welcome here. After the suspension he was back in the squad, and he was very sorry for what he had done. It was disappointing for the group, but now he is back. It is forgotten. It is not a problem anymore. But of course, it cannot happen again. [Lars, player]

After he had accepted and taken the punishment, he was back in the group. Of course, everyone knew what he had done, and he had a way to go, to retain their trust. But he has done this in an exemplary way. That is also something Paco and I have talked a lot about. They are young boys, in the beginning of their career. We are supposed to teach them. Cutting the contact forever is not an option. Of course, if he does the same thing again, then he lacks the ability to learn. But to make a mistake and be forgiven and retain the trust from the boys; that is something I believe creates an even deeper unity in the group and between the players. [Håvard, staff member]

Both the players and the staff seemed to agree that the situation was resolved in a positive way, and they shared that the player was part of the team again. They even argued that the situation might have ultimately created unity and stronger bonds between the players. However, they did not want to witness such behavior again and reported that a second mistake would be punished even more harshly.

4.3.4 Threat from the outside

A difference between club football and national football is the high rate of rollover in national football when players are called up to a squad. Paco explained that more than 50 players are in the selection loop for the team; hence, each squad member has to deliver in order to be called up for the next gathering.

It is always the threat from the outside. To have a chance to survive in this team, you have to give to your teammate, and he has to give back to you. That is your best chance, and even that might not be good enough. It has been like this the whole time. Everyone knows that there are 50+ players who are good enough for this team. They have to think that “*if I am to continue being in this squad, I have to acquire knowledge, and the only way to get the knowledge needed is to give, because if you give, you also receive.*” [Paco, head coach]

I believe they feel a responsibility regarding making sure things work between each other. They know that if two of them manage to work really well together as, for example, a striker couple. Even though only one of them are going to start the next match, they will make sure that both of them are picked in the next squad as well. I believe that has been a key. Because there are plenty of players knocking on the door wanting to be a part of this team. So, if you want to keep your place in the squad, you have to work together with the other players. If they do not collaborate, the chances of one of them missing out on the next squad increases. [Håvard, staff member]

These assumptions were not only stated by the coach. In probing the topic, we noticed that only seven out of the 22 players who were called up to Paco’s first squad were included in the final World Cup squad (Mjaaland, 2017; Madsen, 2019a). Because of this threat of exclusion from the next squad, it is imperative for players to offer their best effort in every session, including when sharing knowledge while watching video clips. If the two attackers in the squad make sure that they both obtain the best possible prerequisite for success, then they both increase their chances of being picked for the next gathering. Hence, the players have an incentive to share their knowledge with each other even though they are competitors.

4.3.5 Effects of giving behavior

The unusual level of giving behavior in this group surprised and interested us. Among both players and staff, it was the only accepted behavior; thus, they formed a group of players who all view this behavior as the only acceptable one. Even in situations where the players are both teammates and competitors, there was no evidence of behavior other than giving behavior. It therefore seemed that there was a safe environment for mutuality among the players, which fostered knowledge sharing (Von Krogh, 1998; Carmelli et al., 2009; Edmondson, 1999). Since the players admitted that they are both teammates and opponents, we argue that their decision to share with each other may be motivated by an unselfish concern for the other person (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009). However, there are also possible selfish reasons for giving in these settings, such as to help their chances of staying in the group and developing further. We do not have sufficient evidence to conclude that containing only people with a giving behavior can lead to success for a group. However, several parameters suggest this possibility. Grant (2013a) has argued that the most highly performing givers tend to both open to helping others and receiving help themselves. Since the culture in the team dictates that they “*are better together*” and cannot reach their maximal level without giving help and learning from that of others, we believe that it sets up the givers on the team to achieve top performance. As illustrated, it is plausible that internal knowledge sharing can help every person produce their best, which yields success on both the individual and collective levels. Additionally, the giving behavior seemed to be a decisive factor for creating unity inside the group, and it may have helped newcomers adapt to the group. In combination, these arguments evidence that the team has succeeded significantly by creating and maintaining a team of players who practice a giving behavior. Their implementation of this giving-oriented culture projects three main elements: a high focus on the benefits of giving from the head coach, staff and among players, which infects others in the group; sanctioning wrong behavior; and the continuous external threat of players who want to become part of the squad.

4.4 Creating a common dream from the dreams of the individuals

4.4.1 The 4-D Model

The presentation of a stairway to the World Cup attracted our attention during the interviews. From the interviews with the head coach, it seemed that he had a plan from the moment he assumed control of the team. He had already developed several steps for how the team would qualify for the World Cup, which he presented in a simple stairway format. Our further research on this aspect yielded several findings that align with the 4-D model from research on appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Therefore, we created our own version of the 4-D model, which is customized for Norway U20. We elaborate on our findings that support these points.

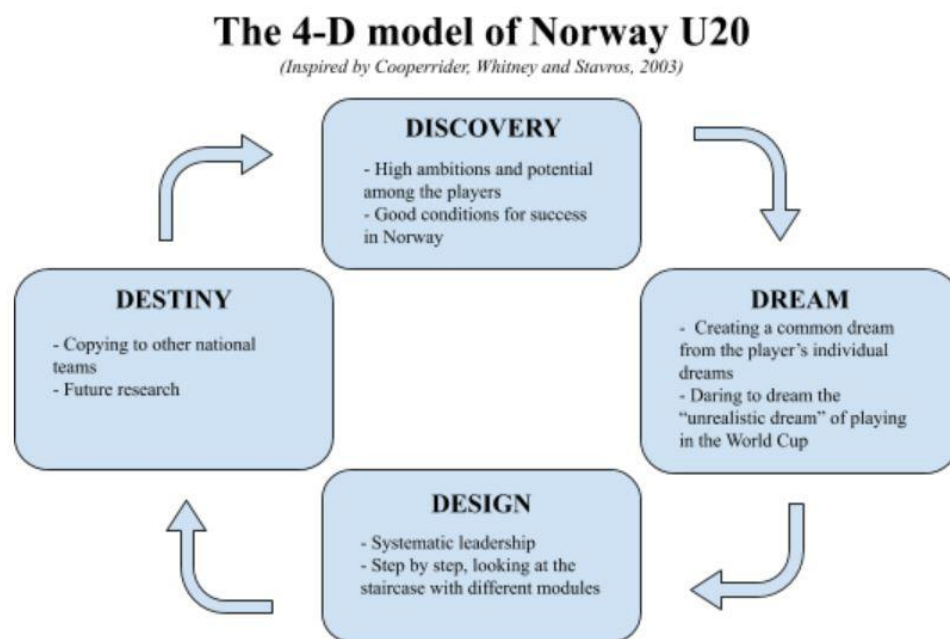


Figure 4: The 4-D model of Norway U20

4.4.2 Discovering potential and ambitions

Early in the process, Paco recognized the potential of the players. He discovered their strong inner motivations and major ambitions. Moreover, he performed research in his previous job at the top football center and discovered that Norway has significant potential to build an exceptional national team of great players.

Within this group of players, I experienced and got the impression that there was something with the Norwegian players that was better than with the Italian and Polish players. They had greater learning capacity, and a huge interest in the game, as well as a “nothing is

impossible” attitude...I also grew up in the nineties, when Norway did pretty good in football. So, I did not find any reason for why we should not be able to get to a high level – not only with this team but with Norwegian football as well. I also did a survey in 2010 when I worked in the center of top football. This survey was about how good or bad the conditions were for success in Norway as a nation. I found out that we have pretty good conditions when it comes to the things that work and drives success football – things like educational level, economy and health. [Paco, head coach]

In addition to the potential that Paco recognized in the players and his convictions that Norway has exceptional potential to foster great players and teams, it was important for him to determine where the players envisioned themselves 10 years in the future.

In the process of getting to know the players, one of the questions was about “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?” They were 17 years old at that time, and we know that the highest level you will achieve in football is at an average age of 27, so it was a highly relevant question. Fifty of the 65 players answered, “I want to play in a top five league,” and I got the impression that they were willing to do what it takes to get there. [Paco, head coach]

These ambitions among the players were not expected by the head coach. He knew that the national team had few achievements and mediocre performance. At the same time, most of the players played for teams that were not in Europe’s top five divisions. The answers surprised him but revealed an opportunity from which he could benefit. Based on the player’s ambitions and the possibilities of Norway as a nation, he started to systematically explore the various milestones that this team could achieve.

The discovery of the players’ ambitions and potential as well as the success factors of Norway as a nation relate to the discovery phase of appreciative inquiry. In this phase, the purpose is to search for and highlight factors that can identify the best of *what is*. Thus, the concern is what is working and what might work in the future (Cooperrider & Whitney 2003; Whitney 1998). His focus on the players’ potential and ambitions instead of their shortcomings gives the impression that Paco chose to have a main focus that is positive rather than negative. Thus, we note parallels between the *discovery* phase of the 4-D model of appreciative inquiry and the focus of the head coach.

4.4.3 Daring to dream

The dream to compete in and win the World Cup was presented by the head coach at the first team gathering. Several players admitted that they were skeptical of this *unrealistic dream*. Based on their prior achievements, this reaction was natural.

This team had not performed particularly well, and it was not at all guaranteed that they would qualify for the Euros in 2018 or the World Cup in 2019. Thus, winning the World Cup trophy seemed like an impossible endeavor. However, after Paco presented them with this dream and explained how they would accomplish it through systematic work and small, incremental steps, the players became convinced of this possibility.

I knew it was a long way to go, but I got more and more optimistic. We had some intermediate objectives along the way. This was to win Euro 2018 qualification 1, and 2, then the goal was to win Euro 2018 and finally the World Cup. So, when it was presented like this, it did not seem that scary to say that we could win the World Cup. [Jonas, player]

We had struggled to win against many terrible teams, but then he says, “we are going to win the World Cup.” We just sat there and laughed and smiled at each other. [Tarjei, player]

Euro 2018 qualification 1 was sort of enough. It could be hard. Euro 2018 qualification 2 was possible, but it could be really difficult, and it was only one team from our group that went to the Euros. Therefore, we thought, “do you believe we can do this? What do you think about us?” It was that kind of feeling we had. [Lars, player]

The head coach’s presentation regarding the World Cup trophy at the first gathering of the team shocked all of the players, who described it as impossible to accomplish. However, because of the head coach’s systematic work toward this goal, the team started to believe that they could achieve it. As the new head coach, Paco managed to present his ideas and immediately implement them. He presented a long-term goal by focusing on small steps toward this dream and managed to make it possible for the players to view the World Cup as a realistic goal.

He builds it up and takes it step by step instead of presenting everything at once. Then, it had been a little too much. He has been great at distributing it over periods. You learn much more, and you get everybody on board. [Hans, player]

In addition to adopting a step by step approach in the presentation, the head coach emphasized the importance of reminding the players of the long-term goal to familiarize them with the idea that winning the World Cup was possible.

On the next gathering, which was two months after, I asked, “what was the last thing I said last time?” I thought I had reached through to them, but I had not. “It was something about the World Cup,” I said. I think it was very distant for them. I believe that in the beginning, it was important to say it until they became familiar with it. However, I also think that it started early because they started to believe in the things we did. [Paco, head coach]

From the beginning, Paco had a plan that was based on his personal ambitions as a trainer as well as on the potential that he saw in the players and in Norway as a football nation. On such basis, he decided that a long-term goal and dream that he would present to the team was to win the World Cup in 2019. For this dream to be

realistic, the head coach believed it was necessary to take the players and their dreams and ambitions seriously. In addition, he stressed the need to work with their strengths. He also always remembered the players' 10-year dreams and considered his job to be to remind them of the "big picture" and project a strong belief in each and every player and his potential to achieve this goal.

I think it has to do with taking the players seriously and the fact that they are able to work with the things they are good at. I also believe you have to work with the small things, and my job is to remind them about the big picture, like the World Cup and top five league. [Paco, head coach]

These findings reflect that Paco learned from early discoveries that daring to dream about winning the World Cup trophy was not unrealistic. Thus, he outlined and presented a possible vision for the future, which is similar to the dream phase of the 4-D model in appreciative inquiry. This dream phase challenges the current status by helping members visualizing another possible future and daring them to dream about a positive outcome (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003; Whitney, 1998). Therefore, by presenting the World Cup trophy at the first gathering, Paco provoked a dream among the players in regard to their possible accomplishments.

4.4.4 Designing a systematic plan

After visualizing the dream of winning the World Cup trophy, the team started to work systematically toward this goal. However, before the first national team gathering, Paco had already devised his plan for the team's evolution and improvement. He developed a systematic plan from January to October, when the first qualification for Euro 2018 was scheduled. The underlying principle of this plan and the broader culture that he wanted to create within the team is the importance of always taking new small steps toward the long-term goal. Accordingly, it is essential that players constantly strive to improve. Even if they did not succeed in every aspect, Paco and the support staff fostered an environment that permitted them to try and fail.

The underlying message is that, if you want to get there, you have to be willing to get up every day and become better. It is not certain that you will succeed, but we are going to take care of you anyway. [Paco, head coach]

The head coach set up a stairway for the team to connect every step of their goals from the first qualification rounds to the ultimate objective of winning the World Cup (for a picture of the stairway, see Appendix 4). Paco also designed another stairway wherein the first step, entitled Version 1.0, involved learning one part of

his tactical approach to the game. When Paco felt that the players had adapted to Version 1.0, he allowed them to upgrade to Version 2.0. He added some tactical considerations to the first step, which secured constant development of the team.

In one of the versions of his stairway, Paco implemented the *scenario plan*. This plan, which was implemented as one step in the mentioned stairway, was described as a key factor for the team's ability to turn around matches. The players explained that when they are close to giving up and they are told to start with the scenario plan, the circumstances change. The scenario plan pursues a tactical change that they practiced, and they strongly believed in the plan. A major reason for experiencing such immense belief in this plan seems to be their early experiences of success when using it.

It makes us believe that it is possible to do it again. If we get in situations where we need a goal in the end, we know that even if we are tired, and it does not look so good, we have done it before, and we know we can turn it around. The fact that we have had some huge positive experiences at the end has been important. [Lars, player]

If we have to use the scenario plan because we need goals, we know that we have used this plan before, and that we have created a lot of chances with it. The fact that we were going to score three goals in the end of the Scotland match was a little over the top of what the staff and the head coach believed, but I was not that surprised, actually. [Jonas, player]

The team's ability to build upon previous positive experiences, such as in the scenario plan, and use early success as an advantage can be linked to the theory of appreciative inquiry, which centers on learning from success (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001). Because of their early success with the scenario plan, they were able to focus on the positive aspects and learn from them in order to move closer to their future dream of winning the World Cup trophy. Thus, the team could identify and appreciate which elements work, which is essential to the theory of appreciative inquiry (Hammond, 2013). This approach of applying their positive experiences from the tactical versions on which they are working seems to be a success factor for their systematic, continuous team development.

Another vital contributor to this systematic plan for their long-term goal that also creates the safety that they desired was the logic of taking significant measures when the stakes are low, and vice versa.

The idea was that every time it was not a qualification or a championship, then we were going to take big steps, but when it was qualification or championship, we were only going to improve the things we already knew. [Paco, head coach]

Before this plan could be set in motion, it was important for Paco to get to know the players and their ambitions. However, an equally important process was the recruitment of his support staff. Before advancing in this plan, it was crucial for Paco to learn that he had people on his support staff with a similar mindset – people who were not exactly similar to him but rather complementary, with a different set of skills (see Chapter 4.2.1).

Another key finding in relation to the head coach's systematic approach to improvement, is his personality and natural traits as a leader. Paco appears to be a person with a particular eye for detail and structure. Several players and people from his staff have highlighted that his planning includes no insignificant details.

Once, I wondered if we had forgotten to do a task. Then, I thought about it one more time and remembered that, of course, he had fixed it. [Egil, staff]

He is so organized. He has control on everything, and he has had a plan over a longer period. What I have seen with other coaches is that they have small holes where things are missing, but with Paco, it is bam, bam, bam. I cannot find the small holes where things are missing. [Hans, player]

His eye for detail, improvement and structure is also natural for him. He described it as *productive paranoia*.

The productive paranoia is built around thinking that, the minute you stop developing, things go the wrong way. I believe it is kind of self-imposed, that we as a team always have to take steps, and then I have to go ahead and do it myself. I also believe it is something I have learned through previous experiences, that this is also the reality. You start losing matches the same moment you believe that you have nothing to learn. So, the uncomfortable constant uncertainty is a driver at the same time, as I have the confidence that this is also what creates. [Paco, head coach].

Thus, several factors have led to the design of the systematic plan for the improvement of this team to unite them toward their long-term goal and dream, namely winning the World Cup trophy. First, the head coach has an eye for detail and an urge to always look ahead toward a long-term goal. Second, the motivation and potential among the players is of equal significance for sharing this goal and daring to dream.

By presenting a multi-step stairway, Paco has outlined a systematic approach to the necessary actions and focus to accomplish this dream. This approach can be linked to the design phase of the 4-D model. This phase is much more concrete compared to the *discovery* and *dream* phases and involves the establishment of directions and

systems to help the group achieve its future dream (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2001).

4.4.5 Making a future destiny

The three phases of *discovery*, *dream* and *design* are complementary. Without the discovery of the potential of the players and of Norway as a country, we believe that it would have been nearly impossible to present the dream about the World Cup. Moreover, without a long-term dream, the steps of the design phase would have been less valuable, as the players would have lacked a specific aim to work toward. Thus, all of the phases are of equal importance. The team has qualified for the U20 World Cup and is the first Norwegian national team to do so in 26 years; thus, they have arguably accomplished success that exceeds expectations.

To transfer this recipe for success to other Norwegian national teams, it is crucial to perform a continuous evaluation of these phases following the final *destiny* phase. In this phase, the various structures and systems that were implemented in the design are evaluated in a positive feedback loop of appreciative learning. In the future, new players, staff and coaches will arrive and, by developing an awareness and consciousness of which factors led to this success, they can learn. Thereby, the appreciative approach will propagate and bear further positive results (Hammond, 2013; Ludema et al., 2006; Cooperrider et al., 2003).

Since this team is playing in the World Cup in late May and June, we are not able to fully evaluate their results. Although we know that they won only one out of three matches of the tournament, we have not had the opportunity to investigate which aspects *went wrong* in the World Cup. Thus, future research should fully evaluate these results to advance the success and appreciative learning.

4.5 Converting values into actions - a practical approach to value-based leadership

4.5.1 A unique unity

In our first meeting with the team, we were already surprised by the unity that we observed. The players appeared to be truly having fun while joking, laughing and spending time together. During the meals, we heard them talking to each other, and

when they were free to do as they wanted, they spent time together in large groups. Based on our own observations and the interviews findings, we quickly developed a sense that there was extraordinary unity within the team. Although we expected some level of unity among players of any football team, we were still surprised by the degree we experienced. As a national football team, Norway U20 consists of players who belong to various football teams in Norway and abroad. Thus, we expected a limit to the unity. We believed that unity among these players would be weaker in the national team compared to in the clubs, as members of the former spend less time together compared to those of the latter. Surprisingly, our results indicate the reverse scenario. Several players described their relationships with other players, the head coach and the support staff on the national team as significantly better than those they experienced at the club level. Furthermore, they considered the national team gatherings to be highlights – especially in recent years – and their attitudes toward the gatherings shifted as the new head coach took over.

Earlier, it was like, “*now it is national team gathering; now it is that tedious thing.*” It was not that fun. But now everyone is looking forward to the gatherings – to get some time off from our clubs, to meet the guys again. This is always something one looks forward to. [Hans, player]

In the past few years, it has been really great coming here. We play in a way that suits me as a player, and I have made many new friends. So, I have been looking forward to these trips. [Jonas, player]

Other examples of the extensive unity of this team emerged in the interviews when players talked about each other. They shared that they viewed the other players as not only teammates but also great friends. Therefore, between the gatherings, the players maintained contact with each other, and they seemed to seize every opportunity to meet with each other in person if they happened to be in the same place at the same time. Several players expressed that they stayed in touch with each other through social media but would also meet up for lunch or a coffee if they had the chance.

I have contact with many of them. We talk on a weekly basis. We talk a lot through social media. We do stuff even though we are not physically together. [Hans, player]

I talk to many of them on a daily basis. We are also traveling a lot with our clubs, so when we are nearby, we almost always meet up to have a coffee and just talk. [Jonas, player]

The unity in the team seemed to extend beyond only the players. We observed a mutual and unusually strong bond between the players, the head coach and the staff. Based on the emphasis on unity, Håvard, one of the coaches, expressed that they

were able to create an environment in which they get to know the players not only as players but also as humans. Håvard highlighted the importance of Paco's leadership by example to become a role model for this topic. This approach is significant to account for the unique unity.

I really feel that these players have a huge trust to this team, and especially Paco, because they get the sense that he wants what is best for them. He has been really good at nurturing this contact; thus, I feel that the players can feel safe with him. That is thanks to the way he works. I do not believe this often comes natural for a national team coach. [Håvard, staff]

This finding was reinforced by several other players, who underlined that Paco demonstrates that he cares about them as people and not merely as players. Therefore, he does function solely as their head coach but also as a person they can come to for support.

It is not only football that is in focus, but he can also come around and ask how it goes. Not all coaches ask about these simple things. He asks questions like, "how are you?" ...you can talk to him in five minutes and not only 30 seconds. Most coaches often ask how it goes, then you answer that you are fine, and then they move along to the next player. Then, it does not feel like the interest from the coach is authentic, I think. [Hans, player]

The team reflected a focus on unity in every aspect of their operations, which has resulted in their engagement in other endeavors besides football, even during important competitions. In the Euro 2018, Paco believed it would be beneficial for the team to perform activities outside the realm of football in order to promote unity and strengthen relationships between the players.

Before the European Championship in 2018, we had a training camp here in Norway, and Paco put up a list of things that was important before this championship. We all thought that he was going to mention structure and things like that, but he did not. Other things came up, and it was things like go to a café, relax, watch Netflix, do what you want. Just ordinary things you do every day.

So, when we were in Finland, we found a really nice swimming area. We travelled there every day and were totally buffoons, and while swimming, we did not give a shit about football. We also went to restaurants and cycled in the evenings. We did not just lie in our rooms just because it was Euro 2018 and we had to get prepared to the most important matches ever. We did *the right* things as well, but we also did what we wanted, and it was really important for the whole group that we did something fun.

I think it was important that things were not that serious, because then I do not think we would have performed as well as we did. [Lars, player]

In a setting such as the Euros, there is intense pressure, and people become anxious and want to perform. The players argued that it was essential for the head coach to emphasize the need to focus on other elements as well to relieve that pressure. Many players admitted that allowing themselves to have fun together as a group even in such a serious setting was decisive for performing as well as they did.

4.5.2 The ability to make the impossible possible

Another distinct finding relates to how the team has managed to make comebacks during matches and situations where they have had low odds of success. Norway U20 has often encountered circumstances in which prospects appeared bleak and almost impossible to reverse. Still, the team has managed to mobilize strength, roughness and brutality, which has permitted them to make comebacks. We believe that this team has managed to mobilize this strength through their practical approach to the value of *råskap*.

One example of transforming an impossible situation into a remarkable result was a game against Scotland in the last qualification round for Euro 2018. Several players identified this game as one of the craziest matches that they have played. In this match, the team was winning 2-0 before half time, but the situation changed early in the second half, and the score was soon 2-4 in favor of Scotland. At that moment, it seemed impossible to reverse the situation. However, the team managed to mobilize its strength and confidence in each other's abilities and their plan. Lars described the last 10 minutes of the game as follows:

There were only 10 minutes left, and we were told to use the *scenario plan* that we have, and which we are confident with. That was the moment that something happened – like, in an instant. If we had not started with the scenario plan, we would never have scored these goals. I am pretty sure...when we scored, and the score was 4-3, we got new energy. It was almost as we became unstoppable. “*We are going to win this,*” we thought. Then we scored again, and it was 4-4, with only four minutes left. However, this felt like plenty of time. We had four minutes to score a goal, and we knew we could do it...This is maybe the craziest match I have ever played and will be playing because it was going up and down the whole match. We never gave up. We also had the scenario plan, and we never gave up as a team. [Lars, player]

The match ended with Norway winning 5-4 in injury time after being awarded a penalty. Although the story above was told by Lars, it could have easily derived from any of the other players. Every interviewee recounted this story in almost the same way. We got the impression that this match was one of the most impressive moments for them as both team members and human beings. The story illustrates how the team managed to overcome a highly difficult situation. Several players cited three main reasons that made this turnaround possible: the scenario plan, which is a tactical change presented in Chapter 4.4.4; their unity; and their determination to never give up, which derives from their work with *råskap*. As the introduction has explained, *råskap* relates to brutality, barbarism or savagery (NAOB, 2019), but its meaning can also be close to that of toughness, roughness,

braveness or excellence in certain areas. The players shared that they felt exhausted on the field, yet they knew that they could feel much worse based on some *råskap tests* that they had undergone. Hence, it was easier for them to find the motivation to give their best effort. The match against Scotland is only one of many examples of this team winning an essential match to advance toward the World Cup in 2019.

4.5.3 The team's work with their values

To clarify how the team created this extraordinary unity as well as their ability to retrieve *råskap* when needed, it is critical to obtain insight into how the head coach and his staff worked with these values during their various training camps. When taking over the team, Paco determined his own approach to implementing and working with these values and to using these guidelines to build the best team possible. He believed that engaging with values required more than simply talking about them: he wanted the players to physically experience the values with their bodies. His thoughts align with Aadland's (2004) research, which has indicated that values must be set in action to make the most of them. The NFF, which has the overall responsibility for all of the national football teams in Norway, has proposed three values for every team to follow: *unity*, *råskap* and *pride*. Paco focused most heavily on unity and *råskap* and explained that he viewed pride as a result of the other two values. Thus, it was vital for him to convert those two values into actions and lessons that the players would remember and transfer to football.

When I was hired, I was told that I had to work with these values on every training camp, and that was fine. Was there put aside a budget for this? No, nothing. "*If I am told to use these values, then I am going to do it in a proper way,*" I thought. All such values, they have to be converted into action, or they are not worth anything. I hate group work, and things like make a poster, and then you are done. I do not believe in such. One has to do something, and then you have to be able to transfer it over to football. [Paco, head coach]

Based on the interviews with players, support staff and the head coach, we observed that the team started to systematically work with these values as soon as in the first gathering. They first addressed unity with problem-solving exercises that required the help of others. Thereby, they encouraged a culture in which everyone understands that they are better off together than alone. At a later gathering, the focus shifted from unity to *råskap*. Accordingly, the staff wanted the players to venture out of their comfort zones and have a new experience. Several exercises created both unity and *råskap* along the way; one example that several players mentioned in regard to *råskap* was an ice swimming challenge. The U20 team was informed that they were having a *råskap-test* and were instructed to assemble

outside in their warmest clothes. No one knew the plan, and everyone was curious and slightly nervous about what they were going to do. The team was divided into two groups, and the first half left 30 minutes before the second. When they arrived at the site of the test, there were numerous reactions from the players. Henrik, one of the players in the second group, offered the following description of his reaction once he realized they would be ice swimming:

It was our turn. We walked a small distance, and we came to a tent. When we came to the tent, we saw a little bit further down that it was carved out a square in the ice, and a man was waiting for us by this hole. I thought "Oh my God!" We went inside the tent, took our warm clothes off so that we were only wearing shorts and a towel. We feared the ice swimming and thought that we were going to freeze to death! [Henrik, player]

As though ice swimming during the winter was not enough of a challenge, this type of ice swimming additionally tested the players' brutality and mental health further. A man who was hired by the head coach was standing next to the hole in the ice to test the players and their reaction to the situation.

When I stood there, I got a really bad feeling, feeling stressed. "*I cannot do this, I am not going to go through with this,*" I thought. But then I jumped into the water and had water up to my waist. When I came up from the water, the man said with a dark voice; "*Is this the best you can do?*" I stood there, freezing, and was almost not able to speak.

I was shaking, and I am not entirely sure why, but I was not able to look at him. I just looked sideways and everywhere else but directly at him. Then he said; "*Look at me when I am talking to you!*" I stood there freezing. It was so insane, and the whole point of this exercise was that we were going to show *råskap* and really find our inner strength. This was a really good exercise to show this...When I jumped into the water the second time after being commanded to do better, I had my whole body and head underneath the water and was under the water for at least five seconds. Then, I went up again and just stood there staring into his eyes. I did not take my eyes off of him. I was angry and cold. I stood there staring at him while I went out from the water. That was exactly the reaction he wanted. He wanted to see the strength in our eyes, because then he knew that we could jump into the water 10 times more. After I had shown him that look, he was really pleased with me...After this, I found out that I was capable of really pushing myself to the limit and finding the strength I need to overcome most challenges. Like in football matches, if you are really tired, then you need to find new energy from somewhere. From this exercise, we learned this mindset, and it was really a helpful learning practice. [Henrik, player]

The ice swimming exercise was completed individually in succession, so it contributed more to *råskap* than to unity among the players. Nevertheless, the common experience of the test might have cultivated some unity and definitely created stories that they have repeatedly recalled.

In preparing for the gathering that we were able to observe, Paco decided that it was time for the team to combine unity and *råskap*. He stated that unity combined with *råskap* equals pride, as it produces results for the team that will make them proud. Thus, through consistent work that interweaves unity and *råskap*, the team can

achieve a higher sense of pride together than as individuals. Therefore, Paco considered it critical not to separate the values but rather to combine them to yield superior results.

After working with unity and *råskap*, we have focused on working with unity and *råskap* together. The group has to show *råskap* together. We have intentionally melted these two together with the intention on having the focus on both. One thing is to see each other, another is to help each other. You have to both see and help. [Paco, head coach]

Based on the approach of combining unity and *råskap*, Paco's goal was to create a better team. In January 2019, he sent the players into the woods without any clear expectations. They were forced to work together in groups and did not know how long they would have to walk or how much they would have to carry. The whole experience resembled a military exercise with no cell phones, scarce food and barely any sleep. The players talked about the trip as though it was hell on earth; however, after they were finished, they admitted that they recognized the value of the exercise. Many of them addressed the experience as one that made them stronger than their opponents, as "no one else does such things." These comments by the players reveal that these exercises promote a stronger mentality. By combining the essence of unity with *råskap*, the players' mentality develops at both the individual and team levels. Cultivating such robust self-confidence through an unshakeable sense of self-belief due to their various experiences is imperative to become a top athlete (Beattie, Hardy, Savage, Woodman & Callow, 2011). Additionally, the players got to know each other in a setting beyond the field, which may have contributed to the team's unity.

You get to know each other better; it is no doubt about it. We sleep in a lavvo and do things together, and it is really social. So, you build relations with the other players. [Jonas, player]

According to Håvard, the effect of such an approach may support an environment that is built on trust, unity and *råskap*, as they confronted challenges in settings besides the football field.

When you come to a national team, everyone does not know each other that well. But then you get to see each other in different settings. After all, it does take some time when you are hiking in the woods for 12 hours, or when you are waiting together for ice swimming, to stand there, dreading, together – to stand together, being excited, not about winning a match, but about something you do not know the outcome of. This is something that happens all the time in a football match, but here, it is in a totally different environment. I think something happens in a group in these settings. They have to learn to trust each other. They get to know each other in a different way, which makes them respect each other. They admit that "*we can be different, but getting to know you is extremely cool, you are a great person!*" That is how you build a team! [Håvard, staff]

I think it helps strengthen the bond between the guys. It is more fun to play on a team with people you are really good friends with that have experienced a lot together. It is easier to communicate with them, and I feel that this is a good way of doing team building. [Karl, player]

Because of this constructed environment and the various exercises, both the players and staff members mentioned the consequence of a stronger team bond.

4.5.4 Effects of value-based leadership

Based on the sections above, the values of unity and *råskap* have arguably had a major influence on the team's success. The use of values in creating this team and its success was the approach of the head coach and his team from day one. According to Fry (2003), value-based leadership is a leadership style whereby values are shared and strongly internalized within a team, and the leader advocates and acts upon these values. There are clear parallels between the work of the head coach of the U20 team and value-based leadership.

According to Snyder et al. (2017), a key aspect of value-based leadership is the cultivation of a culture of engagement wherein the values are a central component of the work. From the day that Paco started as the head coach of the team, he has articulated a long-term goal: winning the World Cup trophy. In combination with this goal, he has systematically incorporated values to build a culture of engagement that motivates players to accomplish their goals. By actively promoting unity and *råskap* through various exercises and acting as a good role model himself, Paco has been able to establish such a culture. Several players on this team mentioned that the way in which Paco leads is an inspiration for them. Thus, we believe that Paco has produced a culture of engagement by articulating the values through action and service as a role model, which has further influenced the team's success.

The conversion of these values into more practical approaches had a remarkably positive effect on several players and staff members. We propose that unity is the most applicable value to the football field, as players easily understand that they perform more effectively as a unit than as individuals. The unity and togetherness that they feel creates a sense of team spirit that can motivate them to accomplish both mundane and challenging tasks. The team is composed of individually talented players; however, there seemed to be a common understanding that the team would

not have been able to reach the World Cup if there was not unity among the players and between the players and staff.

With regard to *råskap*, several players mentioned that without this value – which related to being cold, angry, frustrated, hungry and not knowing what to expect – they would have been less prepared for the toughest football matches. They reflected on the exercises and applied them to other situations, such as cases of adversity on the field.

Say that, in a match, we are under with one goal towards the half time. Then, we can use this trip in the sense that we have experienced worse things before. Everyone knows how this trip was and how painful it was. So, the fact that we have already been through such a painful experience shows that things are not probably that bad in a World Cup match. [Lars, player]

They are ready for whatever may come. They do not lose their head, and they are focused. Their approach to a difficult situation is that this is not necessarily a difficult situation. We will get through this in one way or another. I have a sense that these tests have increased their robustness related to being able to withstand adversity. The ability to withstand, handle and learn from adversity is the number one success criteria to become a top footballer. [Paco, head coach]

In view of the above arguments, we suggest that the main effect of the focus on *råskap* is the creation of more robust players who can more effectively overcome adversity. Even though many of the exercises are difficult to transfer directly to the football field, the players possessed knowledge of how deep they could possibly dig.

PART V: CONCLUSION

This study has explored the leadership characteristics of Norway U20. By analyzing our results in light of Kouzes and Posner's (2014) five leadership practices for reaching success, we have concluded several findings.

The interviews revealed that Paco is a leader who has the respect and admiration of both the staff and the players. He is a role model in how he treats people as well as in his work effort, eye for details and ability to dream big. These descriptions all match the theory that Kouzes and Posner (2014) have presented in the phrase *modelling the way*. As the findings indicate, Paco's personality traits and behavior are elements that seem to have been contagious in influencing others in and around Norway U20. This influence was especially visible in the giving behavior. Because Paco and his staff valued and enhanced the giving behavior, they managed to create a team in which giving behavior is pervasive and whose culture views giving behavior as the only acceptable option. Furthermore, such giving mentality led to knowledge sharing within the team, which, according to Mesmer-Magnus and DeChurch (2009), is beneficial for performance, cohesion and satisfactory decision making inside a group. Hence, we argue that the culture of giving behavior has contributed to stronger unity, which seems to be a major success factor for this team. As the leader of Norway U20, Paco was described as both high in integrity and encouraging of reciprocity. We believe that he managed to generate support and unity by demonstrating to those around him that he is serious, concentrated, devoted and dedicated to practicing his role as the leader of this team.

The second leadership practice from Kouzes and Posner (2014) concerns *inspiring a shared vision*. The way in which Norway U20 worked to connect individual dreams with a common dream and vision was a major success factor for the team. As our own version of the 4-D model from Cooperrider et al. (2003) illustrates, Paco and his staff managed to propagate a shared vision by "dreaming big" while taking one step at a time to accomplish minor victories on the way to the World Cup. By taking small steps toward a greater goal, the team has experienced a continuous feeling of victory, which has in turn created a motivation to work even harder to reach the ultimate goal. We believe that in addition to pursuing the same dream, the practical work on values made the players more committed to the team

and the team's plan. By engaging practically with the values, the whole group assumed an ownership mentality, which encourages them to remain loyal to the vision.

There is no doubt about the team's willingness to *challenge existing truths*. The first and clearest examples were the unorthodox methods of implementing values in this team. Ice swimming, survival trips in the woods and problem-solving exercises are not typical means of preparing for a World Cup; however, our impression is that these measures have been beneficial for Norway U20, as they have managed to render the values practical and internalize them, which makes them more robust and ready for "whatever may come against them." The head coach's willingness to learn from everyone around him and constant openness to discussion with both players and staff reflect a leader who strives for development. Paco's self-diagnosis of *productive paranoia* evidences his inner desire to always move forward and perception that accepting the status quo is retrogressive, which aligns with Kouzes and Posner's (2014) explanation of how leaders should challenge existing processes. Because of this belief, Paco challenged himself to venture out of his own comfort zone, and he additionally urged his staff and the team to do the same. As Chapter 4.3.2 has suggested, this mindset may have increased the openness and giving behavior of the group, which seem to promote unity and high performance.

Both players and staff emphasized a feeling of involvement in the leadership of Norway U20. However, Paco is undoubtedly the main leader of the group. Therefore, we conclude that Norway U20 practices vertical leadership that exhibits traits of a horizontal leadership style. By allowing his staff to take responsibility for certain tasks and decisions, Paco makes them feel valued, respected and involved. Thereby, he fosters engagement within his team that *enables them to act* (Kouzes & Posner, 2014), which creates a sense of team spirit that supports positive results. Moreover, by welcoming questions from players and involving them in decision making, Paco spread the team spirit and ownership across the whole group. As a result, the team felt like a community of people who are willing to sacrifice their personal desires to support the purpose of the team. The players noted the significance of the head coach viewing them as humans rather than players and listening to them when they speak. By ensuring that everyone feels seen, Paco *encourages the hearts* of the people in his group (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). The

story from Euro 2018 wherein Paco decided to give the man-of-the-match price to two players who had not played a single minute of the tournament because they had excelled in empowering the others to perform well, shows the ability to encourage the hearts of the players. Paco and his staff noticed and acknowledged the victories of individuals as well as those of the group, which, according to Kouzes and Posner (2014), creates ownership inside of the group. Players stated that they felt that no one was left out of the leadership within Norway U20, which instills a desire to give back to the team.

In view of the range of explanations above, we establish four main conclusions that answer the research question.

- The coach and the team managed to formulate a common dream from the dreams of the individuals and devised a structured plan with intermediate objectives to progress toward the main goal of reaching the World Cup.
- The team followed one main leader, who was aware of his tasks and responsibilities. At the same time, he managed to include both staff and players in the decision making and allowed them to flourish in their particular skills, which resulted in a vertical leadership style with many horizontal traits. We argue that such an approach that balances vertical and horizontal leadership was important.
- A culture of giving behavior was cultivated and maintained by both players and coaches. This culture was possible through awareness of the topic on the part of the coach, several giving behavior-related exercises and sanctions against non-giving behavior. Additionally, positive utilization of the continuous threat of players from outside of the group has also fostered giving behavior.
- We noted an unorthodox way of working with values on this team that included practical exercises and experiences. We argue that this approach led to an unusual degree of unity and *råskap*, which have in turn supported impressive comebacks on the football field.

These four main conclusions represent significant parts of the success of Norway U20. Each is significant on its own, but their importance is most clear in combination. By implementing these aspects of leadership, the team has managed to achieve massive developments. Even though one may emphasize the importance

and uniqueness of Paco when looking at the success of Norway U20, we argue that the findings presented in this thesis can contribute to development and competence of coaches and leaders of other teams as well. If coaches and leaders look at the findings from this study, and adapt them to their own teams, we believe it will increase the probability of new success being created. The story of Norway U20 is a story of a team rather than of individuals, where everyone participated and wished to develop. Hence, they managed to create success through constant development. As the player, Tarjei stated, *“it is like heaven and hell. There is a significant difference. Things have been totally changed and insanely much better.”*

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide players

Intervjuguide - spillere

Intro

- Kort bli-kjent-snakk.
- Hvem vi er, hva vi forsker på og samtykkeskjema.
- Spør om det er greit at vi tar opp samtalen.

Hoveddel (Alle spørsmål er veiledende, og vi kan gå utenfor dette)

Generelt

- Hva er hovedgrunnen til at dette landslaget har gjort det så bra?
- Hvordan er forholdet ditt til trenerne og støtteapparatet? Hvem har vært viktig for deg?
- Hvordan er forholdet ditt til medspillerne? Hvem henger du mest med? Er det gjenger, eller henger alle med alle?
- Har dere noen verdier på landslaget? Hvilke? Hva betyr disse for deg? Hva betyr disse for dere som lag?

Delingskultur

- Dere har sittet ned sammen med lagkamerater, som også kjemper om deres plass på laget, og ser videoklipp av dere selv. Her kommer dere med tilbakemeldinger osv. Kan du fortelle hvordan dette fungerer?
- Hva gjør det med deg når du skal gi tilbakemeldinger til lagkameratene dine, som også kan være motstanderne dine i kamp om plassen på laget?
- Er du helt ærlig i tilbakemeldingene, eller holder du litt igjen for at det skal kunne tjene deg? Har du noen gode eksempler på hvordan dette har hjulpet deg eller dere som lag?

Suksesshistorier

- Et kjennetegn på dette landslaget har vært å avgjøre kamper på slutten, og å aldri gi opp, selv om det ser mørkt ut. Kan du forklare hvorfor det er blitt slik?
- Er dette noe dere har trent på?
- Er det bare spillerne som er rå?
- Gjør trenerne noe spesielt?
- Benytter dere dere av tidligere gode opplevelser som gir troen på at det kan skje igjen?

Fokus på ulikheter

- Dere har jobbet mye med “farger”, og alle nye spillere går gjennom den såkalte “fargeprøven”. Hvordan har du opplevd dette?
- Hvordan har dette hjulpet deg som spiller og utviklet deg?
- Hvordan tror du fargeprøven kan ha bidratt til å skape et bedre samspill i laget?

Avrundning

- Åpent spørsmål om de har noe å tillegge.
- Åpent spørsmål om de har noen historier de vil fortelle.
- Sjekke at vi har forstått de rett.

Appendix 2: Interview guide coaches

Intervjuguide trenere og støtteapparat

Intro

- Kort bli-kjent-snakk.
- Hvem vi er, hva vi forsker på og samtykkeskjema.
- Spør om det er greit at vi tar opp samtalen.

Hoveddel (Alle spørsmål er veiledende, og vi kan gå utenfor dette)

Om samlingene (Hovedsakelig for første intervju med Paco)

- Når startet dere med dette laget?
- Hvor mange samlinger har dere hatt?
- Har det vært mye utskiftninger av støtteapparat?
- Har det vært mye utskiftninger av spillere?
- Hvor mange av spillerne har deltatt på ca 80% av samlingene eller mer?
- Hvor mye tid har dere tilbrakt sammen de siste årene?
- Hva slags kontakt har dere med spillerne utenfor samlingene?

Innhold i samlingene

- Hva slags fokus har dere hatt på samlingene? Langsiktig/kortsiktig fokus? Resultatorientert eller fremgang på noen områder av gangen?
- Er det en rød tråd i samlingene, eller er det nye tema fra gang til gang?
- Hvor mye er fotballfokus og hvor mye er annet i løpet av en samling?
- Har dere jobbet med verdier? Fortell hvordan dette er blitt gjort i praksis. Hvilken betydning har dette hatt for dere som lag?
- Hvilke konkrete tiltak har dere gjort for å skape et godt samhold i gruppen?
- Hvordan jobber dere med ulike styrker og svakheter hos de forskjellige spillerne?
- Har dere jobbet med følelser? Hvordan holde hodet kaldt når følelsene spiller inn som mest, feks.
- Har dere gjort noe godt for andre for å samle gruppen og løfte perspektivet i løpet av samlingene?

Delingskultur

- Har dere jobbet med å skape en delingskultur i gruppen? Hvordan?
- Kan du fortelle om hvordan dere oppfordrer til delingskultur blant spillerne?
- Hvor flinke er spillerne til å dele sine beste og dårligste erfaringer med hverandre?
- Føler dere at spillerne gir ærlige tilbakemeldinger til dere og til hverandre?

Appreciative Inquiry

- Når er dere på deres beste?
- Benytter dere tidligere suksess/suksesshistorier i arbeidet med fremtidig suksess? Hvordan?
- Jobber dere med å bli bedre på svakheter, eller å styrke styrkene deres? Hvordan skjer dette?

Tilbakemeldinger

- Hvordan er muligheten for tilbakemeldinger fra spillerne?
- Etterspør dere tilbakemeldinger?
- På hvilke måter har spillerne kunnet gi tilbakemeldinger på fotball, livet ellers, samlingene, innhold, relasjoner osv?
- Hvordan skiller dere mellom spontane tilbakemeldinger i en opphetet diskusjon og gjennomtenkte tilbakemeldinger når følelsene ikke lenger tar overhånd?

Avrundning

- Åpent spørsmål om de har noe å tillegge.
- Åpent spørsmål om de har noen historier de vil fortelle.
- Sjekke at vi har forstått de rett.

Appendix 3: Consent form

Request for participation in research project “*The Success Story of The Norwegian Under 20 National Football Team*”

Background and aim of study

This project aims to investigate the success of the Norwegian under 20 national team in football.

The *research question* of the study is: *What characterizes the leadership practices within the Norway U20 team?*

The project is part of a master thesis at BI Norwegian Business School (Handelshøyskolen BI, Campus Oslo).

What does participation involve?

Participation in the project involves an interview with a maximum length of 45/60 minutes. The interview will cover topics such as your experience with giving behavior, appreciative inquiry and creating a winning culture. The interview will be recorded.

What happens to the information from the interview?

All information collected in the interview will remain confidential. The individuals who will have access to the information are the Project Leads (Daniel Bruland Aartun and Andreas Emblem Særslund), and no identifiable information about the participant will be connected to the audio recording. The recordings will be marked according to a coding system that will be stored separately from the audio files. No participant will be recognizable in a potential future publication using the data.

Generalized summations may be made based on interviews, but no information that cannot be de-identified will be made available outside the research team without explicit approval of interviewees.

The project will end on July 1st 2019, and all recordings will be deleted after being transcribed and anonymized.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the study, and you can withdraw your consent at any time without providing a reason. In the case that you withdraw from the study, all information about you will be anonymized.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Daniel or Andreas (daniel.aartun2208@gmail.com, asaersland@gmail.com). The project is supervised by Øyvind Kvalnes, who can be reached at (95204496) or (oyvind.kvalnes@bi.no)

This study has been reported to NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data
(Norsk senter for forskningsdata)

Consent to participate in the study

I have received information about the study and consent to participate.

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 4: Picture: stairway towards the World Cup



This is the picture that Paco showed to the players throughout the period. It was also presented to the media when the World Cup squad was presented (Madsen, 2019b).