

## Sport Team Culture of Malaysian College Athletes

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**Abstract:** *This study examined sport team culture among athletes in the Malaysian Public Universities. Team Culture Inventory was adopted from Kao & Cheng (2005). A total of 316 student athletes were surveyed using convenience sampling method. Research findings revealed that there were more males student athletes (60.8%) than female athletes (39.2%). Majority (73%) of the athletes was involved in team sport and 57% of them were in the university and state teams. Only 14.5% of the athletes hold leadership positions including captain and assistant captain. The ranking of team culture sub-domains showed that 'togetherness within other team member' sub-domain was ranked first, 'compliance to coaching' second, 'competitive desire' third and 'perseverance' fourth for the respondents of the whole sample, males and females respondents. Inferential statistics found that there were no significant differences in team culture among athletes according to gender, age groups, category of sports and level of involvement. However, one-way ANOVA results revealed significant difference in the 'together within other team member' sub-domain ( $F[3,312] = 4.044, p < 0.05$ ). Team captains have a more positive team culture as compared to athletes holding other team posts. The findings have significant implications for coaches and sport program directors.*

**Keywords:** *Sport culture, Athlete's culture, Team culture*

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### I. Introduction

One of the most important experiences athletes and coaches can have is to be a member of a team. A strong team culture means values are shared deeply by team members. Consequently, the development and nurturing of team culture leads to team effectiveness (Hardy & Grace, 1997).

Every group or team develops its own culture to improve team effectiveness. As such the need to study the various cultural influences on sport team and coaching behavior has become increasingly important because of the enormous and continuous dissemination of new coaching information (Ryska, Yin, Cooley & Ginn, 1999). Even though social environment is significant in examining sport, sport psychology research has almost exclusively focused on the individual (Kao & Cheng, 2005) thus knowledge about sport teams are rather limited (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998).

Marten (2012) stressed that in sport physical training, conditioning and tactics are not the only elements to achieve success but what is equally important is to nurture the culture of a team. In supporting the notion, other researchers (Weinberg & Gould, 2011) reiterated that great teams do not only depend on talent but how that talent is blended into one.

Team culture is the way things are done in a team. It is the soul and spirit of a team. A healthy team culture creates a climate for success (Martens, 2012). Martens (2012) emphasized that if a team's culture is not adequately developed, or is incompatible with the team direction, a team may function substantially below its performance capabilities and widespread dissatisfaction is likely to occur. Team climate develops from how athletes perceive the interrelationships among team members. In addition, athletes' perceptions and evaluations set the team culture (Weinberg & Gould, 2011). Effective team culture could be built through social support (Weinberg & Gould, 2011) which include 'listening support', 'emotional support', 'emotional-challenge support', 'reality-confirmation support', 'task-appreciation support', 'task-challenge support', and 'personal-assistance support' (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1997). It is important for a coach to emphasize team concept and the spirit of supporting each other at the beginning of the season (Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

Social supports include compliance to coaching. Compliance is a form of social influence that involves a direct request, often by a person in need, such as a coach. It is the process by which we change our attitudes, values and behaviors in response to the attitudes or behaviors, or both, of other people. Compliance is associated with the trust in a coach. Athletes trust their coaches if they believe in their coaches' good intentions (Gallucci, 2008). When they trust their coaches, they have a strong tendency to accept coaching decisions, and are more willing to accept individual roles in the team, and will sacrifice individual goals for team goals (Gallucci, 2008, Valle & Bloom, 2005).

However, compliance to coaching is not enough to achieve a team's goal as perseverance is also needed to achieve team success. Perseverance is considered as persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose and it is the characteristics that keeps one trying although it is physically and mentally exhaustive (Kao & Cheng, 2005). It is one of the elements of mental toughness. Mental toughness is the ability to play one's best in any situation, particularly when encountering problems, obstacles, adversity, or failure. It

brings out the best in performers when they have the most at stake. Mental toughness revolves around creating and maintaining an ideal mental performance state (Gallucci, 2008).

Mental toughness coupled with competitive desire would ensure team success. Martens (2012) defined competition as a process that encompasses four distinct events or stages (objective competitive situation, subjective competitive situation, response and consequences). Different athletes experience different competitive processes. An individual is capable of influencing the relationship among various stages (Weinberg & Gould, 2011). Personal attributes, such as previous experience, ability, motivation and attitude could influence a person's responses in a competition. In short, the competitive process could be viewed through four stages.

Team culture can take many forms. It includes developing a winning attitude, instilling commitment, inculcating pride, building team spirit, organizing practice procedures, understanding game protocol, committed to the style of leadership, accepting how decision is made and dress codes. However, this study was to examine team culture in terms of perseverance, compliance to coaching, togetherness within other team member, and competitive desire.

## II. Methodology

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is a composite of the schematic conception of four team culture factors (Fig. 1). The conception of team culture is based on the model proposed by Kao and Cheng (2005). This team culture model deals with the relationship of four domains that is perseverance, compliance to coaching, togetherness within other team member and competitive desire.



**Fig. 1: The Team Culture Model (Kao & Cheng, 2005)**

### 2.2 Participants

Convenience sampling method was used to solicit information from student athletes. The sample consisted of 316 undergraduate athletes from six public universities (192 males, 124 females) aged 17-26 years (M = 23.54 years, SD = 1.83) and they have participated in 23 various sports. Thirty nine of the athletes participated in individual sport (e.g. shooting, weight lifting, athletics, and rhythmic gymnastics), 229 in team sport (e.g. netball, basketball, volleyball, hockey, and softball), 35 in mixed sport (e.g. badminton, archery, table-tennis and squash) and 18 in martial arts (e.g. Malay Martial Art [*'SilatOlahraga'*], Tae-kwon-do and Karate). In terms of level of involvement, athletes were involved at national (n = 20), state (n = 131), university (n = 103), zone (n = 12), district (n = 21), college (n = 15), and school (n = 14) levels. As for position held, only 14.5% of the surveyed athletes hold a post in their teams. Thirty two held the post of captain, 5 were assistant captains and 9 held other posts in their teams.

### 2.3 Measures

The inventory consisted of 25 items which were divided into 4 sub-domains. The four sub-domains are 'perseverance' (9 statements), 'compliance to coaching' (6 statements), 'togetherness within other team member' (5 statements) and 'competitive desire' (5 statements). The four factors or dimensions were found to be

internally consistent with high alpha coefficients: perseverance (0.91), compliance to coaching (0.88), togetherness within other team member (0.86) and competitive desire (0.83). The coefficient alpha for the whole sample is 0.92. The inventory was pilot tested in Malaysia and reliability of the four sub-domains was reported as: perseverance (0.871), compliance to coaching (0.860), togetherness within other team member (0.846) and competitive desire (0.812). The reliability of inventory was 0.931.

The statements were scored from one to six. All the items were weighed on a priori weight method from Very Much My Characteristic (6), My Characteristic (5), Majority of them My Characteristic (4), Majority of them Not My Characteristic (3), Not My Characteristic (2) to Very Much Not My Characteristic (1). The sum of the 25 items provides an indication of a subject's team culture. A maximum score of 150 points would indicate a very high level of Team Culture while a minimum score of 25 points would indicate otherwise.

### 2.4 Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and unweighted mean were calculated. Unweighted mean is calculated by dividing the mean value of each sub-category with the number of items. A mean value above 3.50 showed dominant team culture, a mean value below 3.50 is considered the opposite and a mean value of 3.50 is deemed neutral. T-tests were computed to determine whether differences exist in the stress mean scores for each sub-category according to gender. One-way ANOVA were computed to determine whether differences existed between the team culture mean scores for the independent factors of age, category of sport, level of involvement and position held in the team. All t-test and ANOVA in this study were carried out at 95% confidence level, using SPSS Ver. 16 for Windows. For the one-way ANOVA, where F-tests were significant, a post-hoc test using the Tukey-HSD test was employed.

### III. Research Findings

As shown in Table 1, the males and female athletes demonstrated moderate high score for team culture (unweighted mean = 4.85). 'Togetherness within other team member' sub-domain (unweighted mean = 5.02 & 5.01) was the most dominant sub-domain as compared to the other three sub-domains. Both male and female athletes ranked the four sub-domains similarly.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Team Culture Sub-Domains for Male (N=192) and Female (N=124) Athletes

Sub-scale	No. of item	Mean Scores		Unweighted Mean		Std. Deviation		Rank	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Perseverance	9	42.98	42.59	4.78	4.73	5.68	5.48	4	4
Compliance to Coaching	6	29.19	29.35	4.87	4.89	4.29	4.41	2	2
Togetherness within Other Team Member	5	25.10	25.05	5.02	5.01	3.37	3.64	1	1
Competitive Desire	5	24.04	23.70	4.81	4.74	3.81	3.81	3	3

Note: M = Male, F = Female

**Table 2:** T-Tests of Mean Differences in Team Culture Scores of Male and Female Athletes

Team Culture sub-domains	Variable	No. of cases	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p
Perseverance	Male	192	42.98	5.68	0.605	0.545
	Female	124	42.59	5.48		
Compliance to Coaching	Male	192	29.19	4.29	- 0.325	0.746
	Female	124	29.35	4.41		
Togetherness within Other Team Member	Male	192	25.10	3.37	0.126	0.900
	Female	124	25.05	3.64		
Competitive Desire	Male	192	24.04	3.81	0.775	0.439
	Female	124	23.70	3.81		
Team Culture	Male	192	121.31	13.78	0.379	0.705
	Female	124	120.69	14.75		

Based on the results in Table 2, t-values were not significant at  $p < .05$  for all the four sub-domains. Hence, there were no significant differences between male and female athletes for all the four sub-domains. Table 3 showed the relationship between team culture and position held in the team. For the purpose of this analysis, the positions held in the sport teams were categorized into team captain, assistant captain, other position or team member (no position). F-values of the four domains in Table 3 showed that only the 'Togetherness Within Other Team Member' domain was significant at  $p < .05$ . Team captains ( $M = 26.35$ ) have a more positive team culture as compared to athletes holding other posts in the teams ( $M = 22.33$ ). Inferential statistics on team culture based on age groups (perseverance [ $F=0.888, p>0.05$ ], compliance to coaching [ $F=1.841, p>0.05$ ], togetherness within other team members [ $F=1.878, p>0.05$ ], competitive desire [ $F=2.448, p>0.05$ ]), category of sports (perseverance [ $F=1.381, p>0.05$ ], compliance to coaching [ $F=1.003, p>0.05$ ],

togetherness within other team members [ $F=1.644$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], competitive desire [ $F=0.420$ ,  $p>0.05$ ]) and level of sport involvement (perseverance [ $F=1.122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], compliance to coaching [ $F=1.568$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], togetherness within other team members [ $F=0.444$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], competitive desire [ $F=1.672$ ,  $p>0.05$ ]) were not statistically significant for each of the team culture sub-scales.

**Table 3:** Anova on Mean Team Culture Scores of Student Athletes When Compared To Position Held in Sport Team

Sub-domain		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Post-hoc Tukey-HSD
Perseverance	Between Groups	62.127	3	20.709	.660	.577	NS
	Within Groups	9795.300	312	31.395			
	Total	9857.427	315				
Compliance to coaching	Between Groups	91.791	3	30.597	1.642	.180	NS
	Within Groups	5812.447	312	18.630			
	Total	5904.237	315				
Togetherness within other team member	Between Groups	142.280	3	47.427	4.044	.008*	C > OP
	Within Groups	3658.742	312	11.727			
	Total	3801.022	315				
Competitive desire	Between Groups	70.281	3	23.427	1.627	.183	NS
	Within Groups	4492.057	312	14.398			
	Total	4562.339	315				
Team culture	Between Groups	972.684	3	324.228	1.629	.183	NS
	Within Groups	62103.784	312	199.051			
	Total	63076.468	315				

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

TM = Team member, C = Captain, AC = Assistant Captain, OP = Other Position held

#### IV. Discussions

The findings of this study showed that as a whole, student athletes from the Malaysian public universities demonstrated favourable response toward team culture. In addition, both male and female student athletes ranked all the four sub-domains similarly. The mean scores for team culture and the four sub-domains were almost similar for both male and female athletes. This finding is consistent with the findings of Weinberg and Gould (2011) in their work of 'Group and team dynamics'. They emphasized that sports teams are a special type of group. It was found that athletes in group have mutual interaction and task interdependence which subsequently led to collective sense of identity; the 'we-ness' rather than 'I-ness'. Similarly other researchers (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998) stressed that team members must interact with each other to accomplish shared objectives.

Perseverance is considered as steady persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose which is also known as steadfastness. The high unweighted means for male and female (4.78 and 4.73) showed that athletes in this study were tough mentally. Mental toughness is the ability to play one's best in any situation, particularly when encountering problems, obstacles, adversity, or failure. It brings out the best in performers when they have the most at stake. Mental toughness revolves around creating and maintaining an ideal mental performance state (Burton & Raedeker, 2008). However, contemporary social psychologists have shifted their emphasis from static personality traits to an increased emphasis on the importance of the interaction between cognitive processes and situational factors in influencing behavior (Bowers, 1973; Mischel, 1968). On the other hand, Deci (1978) argued that process motivation is more likely to lead to consistent behaviour than product motivation because the continued participation of the athlete is not unduly dependent upon an objectively successful outcome (Deci, 1978). Athletes involved would enjoy their participation without being affected by extrinsic motivation. As such, coaches can intentionally nurture this process orientation in their athletes (Luschen, 1970). Other researchers concurred that persistence in sport is likely if the group atmosphere in which the activity takes place is perceived by the athlete to be socially supportive. Persistence in an activity is partially a function of the quality of the environment in which the athlete functions (Duquin, 1978).

The high unweighted means of compliance to coaching for male ( $M=4.87$ ) and female ( $M=4.89$ ) could be explained in terms of compliance, which is a form of social influence that involves a direct request, often by a person in need, such as a coach. In addition, compliance to coaching may be viewed in terms of social influence. Social influence is the process by which a team member changes his or her attitude, value and behaviour in response to the attitudes or behaviours, or both, of other people. In sport, the most important

feature of a team that influences us to change our behaviour is the relative importance of the team to us. When a person is influenced by many, and goes along with their decision, the person is said to be conformed to the group. Although people are likely to conform to a unanimous majority, the conformity level reduces (but not disappear) when the majority is no longer unanimous. Conformity to others is likely to increase as the number of people in the group also increases. There is no exact group size at which conformity will peak, which could apply to sports teams. Similarly, the high values of 'togetherness within other team member' sub-domain for both male and female athletes (unweighted mean = 5.02 & 5.01) mean that the spirits of team members to stick together as family members was very high (unweighted mean > 3.5) (Kao & Cheng, 2005) and it is definitely the results of team members compliance to coaching as well.

As for the high unweighted means for competitive desire for male (M=4.81) and female (M=4.74), this maybe due to the fact that highly competitive person tends to seek out competitive situations and be more motivated to achieve than person with lower levels of competitiveness. This is supported by Gill and Dector's (1988) three competitive orientations: competitiveness, win orientation and goal orientation. According to Gill and Dector (1988), competitiveness is an enjoyment of competition and desire to strive for success in competitive sport settings. A competitive person simply loves to compete and actively seeks competitive situations. When the focus is to win in a competition, a person is said to be in the 'win orientation'. Due to the focus on interpersonal comparison and winning in competitions; winning becomes more important than improving their personal best. However, in certain situations, an individual's desire to compete is just to improve on personal performance. When that happens, the orientation is said to be 'goal orientation'. Gill (1988) found that males were more competitive and also scored high on win orientation as compared to females who scored high on task orientation. Gill (1988) also found that athletes scored higher on the three orientations especially the competitiveness sub-scale, as compared to non-athletes. However, other research findings (Gill, 1988; Weinberg, Burton, Yukelson & Weigand, 2000) revealed that athletes are task oriented, giving importance to improving their achievement and placing winning as the second important goals. In addition, other researchers (Hardy, Jones & Gould, 1996) found that elite athletes scored high on both win and goal orientation.

As majority of the athletes were from team sports (72.5% of the total number of athletes), the non-significant results may be explained by Carron's (1982) statement that the teams that stay together for a long time have a strong desire for group success and also exhibit high levels of group cohesion. Similarly, other researchers (Smith & Bar-Eli, 2007) emphasized that the rate of interaction among team members is greatly enhanced in interacting-type team sports since the task is such that it requires member-reliance upon others to complete their sub-task. In addition athletes' positive team culture may also be explained in terms of self – satisfaction (Carron & Dennis, 2001). When athletes are satisfied, their task and social cohesion improve (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991) and this leads to positive team culture. This finding is not consistent to the findings of Granito and Rainey (1988) who found that level of competition seems to influence cohesion, with high school teams being more cohesive than collegiate teams. However, team culture may be developed by mere characteristics of team being more distinctive from others because they have special uniforms and unique group names (Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

The findings on the 'togetherness within other team member' domain showed significant differences between athletes holding the position of captain (M = 26.35) and athletes holding other posts in the team (M = 22.33). Leadership in sport depend on characteristics of leaders, group members and situations (Smith & Bar-Eli, 2007). The higher mean value of athletes holding team captain post as compared to those team members holding other post (other than assistant team captain) may be explained in terms of responsibility to the team. Team captain has to play a more crucial role as compared to those athletes holding other sport team posts. Leadership not only provide direction to others (team members) but also to develop team culture to achieve common goals. In this context, the team captain has to unite team members to form team culture (Martens, 2012). Gallucci (2008) stressed that a team thrives and make togetherness a top priority when members have time for each other, treat each other fairly, follow agreed-upon rules, respect and trust each other.

## **V. Conclusion And Recommendation**

This study examined sport team culture among athletes in the Malaysian Public Universities. Research findings revealed that there were more male student athletes (60.8%) than female athletes (39.2%). Majority (73%) of the athletes was involved in team sports; 57% of them were in university and state teams with almost 60% of them male. Only 14.5% of the athletes hold a leadership position. The ranking of team culture sub-domains showed that 'togetherness within other team member' sub-domain was ranked first, 'compliance to coaching' second, 'competitive desire' third and 'perseverance' fourth for the respondents of the whole sample. Inferential statistics found that there were no significant differences in team culture among athletes according to gender, age groups, category of sports and level of involvement. However, ANOVA results of team culture on

position held revealed significant difference in the 'together within other team member' sub-domain. Team captains have a more positive team culture as compared to athletes holding other team positions.

The findings have significant implications for coaches, sport program directors, and sport administrators. As such these findings should be made available to them in order to strengthen the relationships between coaches, program directors, sport administrators and athletes.

In addition, the sample of this study is confined to public university athletes, similar studies should be conducted on other groups of students from private educational institutions and a cross cultural study should also be considered. Furthermore, as only 6% of the national athletes were involved in this study, a follow-up study focusing on national athletes is recommended and would be useful to compare national team culture to other national teams as well.

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