

FC MIDTJYLLAND

A MODERN FOOTBALL CLUB

AN ESSAY IN THE COURSE *SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANISATIONS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the cultural cornerstones that guide the Danish football club, FC Midtjylland (FCM). Based on empirical data mainly from the documentary, *Oprøret fra Heden*, we conduct an analysis of the environmental conditions of FCM, the management of learning, and finally the organizational culture. We identify four different cultural assumptions that guide the development of the organization; *Improvement is always possible*, *Ambition is Important*, *It is better to act now than later* and finally *Through hard work we can navigate the unknown*. The integration of these cultural assumptions is discussed. Finally, we discuss our methodological limitations, the retention of culture in FCM, and apply a post-modern lens to the field of football.

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INTRODUCTION

It's the 9th of July and the final whistle in the match between FC Midtjylland and FC København resound over the stadium of MCH Arena in the town of Herning. FC København, the mastodon of Danish soccer through the 2000s and 2010s, has been defeated 3-1 securing FC Midtjylland the victory in the Danish Superliga. Their results in recent years made some commentators talk about a transition of power in Danish soccer, placing FC Midtjylland at the throne. Midtjylland started as a hybrid of two lower league teams unable to reach the professional level but has since developed drastically to where it is today competing in the most prestigious football competition, Champions League, against the very best teams in the world.

The examination of culture within football clubs has been sparse although there is a general assumption about the importance of culture for a team to perform. When things are rolling for a team the notion "winners' culture" is often used to describe them, but how to obtain this culture and maintain it has never been investigated in depth. While some teams generally over perform some does the opposite indicating that there is more to the game than just the quality of the players.

In this paper we wish to analyze the cultural cornerstones through Midtjylland's 21 years lifetime as presented in the documentary, Oprøret fra Heden. Here we will dig into the key components behind the transformation including how the organization has managed its environment and proceeded through learning. We will also illuminate how the club copes with being a multicultural and multinational organization.

This leads us to the following research question:

What are the cultural cornerstones that shape the organizational development of FC Midtjylland?

EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION

The documentary “Oprøret fra Heden” serves as our empirical foundation. It is a documentary produced by Eurosport/Discovery Network, that serves to give the viewer an “inside look” of the football club. The documentary is structured around a large number of interviews with important actors within the organization. These are members of the board, the founders as well as the current CEO. Board meetings and group discussions are included, along with football matches, training sessions, and locker room talks.

The focus is mainly on the management, with the players playing a smaller role. The management is the main focus of our analysis.

In short, the documentary covers a lot of the organization’s “backstage”.

Using a documentary as an empirical source brings significant issues regarding its validity.

The documentary is oriented towards TV and streaming viewers on Eurosport and Discovery Network. We assume FCM had some considerations when agreeing to the interviews and filming, demanding some control over what was later published. This does make it a good candidate for analyzing how FCM would like to brand and present themselves as an organization, and what narratives they’d like to present about themselves. We supplement this with relevant articles.

To conclude the main points in this section, our data material does not allow us to conclude with certainty about the reality of the organization but does allow us an analysis of how the organization wants to be portrayed.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES:

In order to investigate FC Midtjylland, we will preliminarily present some leading organizational paradigms based on the work of Richard Scott. We describe the organizational assumptions that constitute the foundation for our analysis.

Scott takes departure in the closed system theory emerging at the beginning of the 19th century, inspired by Max Weber's notion of bureaucracy. Here organizations are understood as closed entities intended to obtain specific ends with maximum efficiency (Scott 2006:35). Emphases are on formalized rules to provide stable expectations and predictability. The subsequent epoch known as the theory of natural systems, has a less rigid interpretation of the dynamic within the organization describing it as an organism (ibid:73). In this perspective, ranging from about 1930 to 1960, organizations are collectives relying on informal structures where the personal relations and characteristics are of great importance (ibid:62). In about 1960 yet another version emerged in the post-World War 2 era, perceiving organizations as belonging to a web of more or less loosely interconnected and interdependent subsystems (ibid:96). In contrast to the closed system theory, the open system theory regards organizations as complex with blurred boundaries, not solid (Ibid:88). Here the emphasis is on gaining knowledge and processing information (ibid:92, 102). The organization's gain of resources from the environment is of great importance as it is essential to its survival (ibid:95).

It is important to note that the ascendance of the open system perspective has not meant the disappearance of the former views (Scott 2006:107). In our analysis of FC Midtjylland, we find the open system theory to be the most useful perspective. The football world is a complex system containing many subsystems, blurred boundaries and exchanges of resources. These exchanges are analyzed in the section; *The Environment of FCM*. The open system perspective is supplemented by elements from the natural system theory, namely its emphasis on culture and interpersonal relations.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS

The term "culture" is often used in a variety of settings. In this chapter, we define our understanding of the term and through what lens we view organizational culture.

Seeking to get an understanding of the cultural dynamics in FCM, we must first address the issue of what exactly culture is and can be defined as.

Following Schein's (1997) definition we define culture as:

“A pattern of shared basic assumptions the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein 1997:12)

This definition of culture allows us to analyze the culture of FC Midtjylland through Schein's three level model.

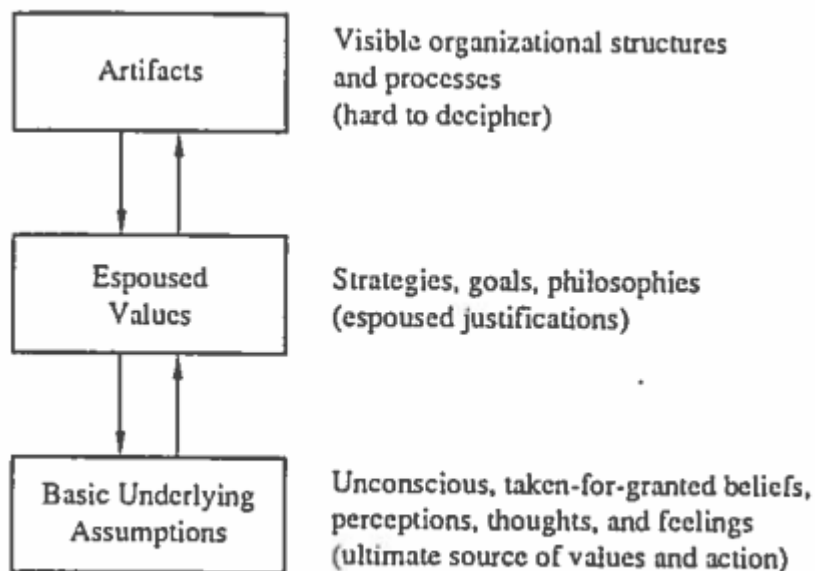


Fig. 1, Schein's model of cultural levels (Schein 1997:17).

The above figure categorizes culture in three independent “levels”, which can be analyzed.

“Artifacts” refer to the visible processes and structures within the organization (ibid.).

While these artefacts tell us much about the organization's practice it is much more difficult to derive anything about the organization's culture from just them. Attaching meaning to artefacts brings us to the second level - espoused values (ibid:19).

Espoused values cover articulated strategies, goals and philosophies - as well as rules of behavior that govern a group (ibid. The espoused values provide a justification for the work, or the way work is being done (ibid).

As Schein points out, many companies attempt cultural changes, but old tried and tested practices still flourish long after (ibid:20). Such issues bring us to the third level of culture.

The third level, the “basic underlying assumptions” cover the deeply rooted, fundamental values that the two other levels are built upon (ibid:21). These underlying assumptions are created from the second level values working, and slowly becoming accepted assumptions. In this way, espoused values will draw upon assumptions that remain unarticulated (ibid:22).

The issue of changing basic assumptions is further discussed in the “Single and Double Loop Learning” section.

This framework forms the basis of our cultural analysis, but we find that it has a blind spot. In an organization like FCM, the presence of a multicultural player group provides unique problems to tackle. Therefore, we draw on studies by Hofstede to study possible conflicts in a multi-national organization like FCM. Hofstede helps us grasp the variance between cultures in an international context.

In brief, we understand culture as defined by Schein and use his framework for analysing the underlying assumptions of FCM. Works by Hofstede will be introduced to shed light on the multinational aspects of the organization's culture and how this might be managed.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF FCM:

We will in this chapter touch upon the environment of FC Midtjylland. This section analyses how Midtjylland secures resources for survival and progression.

We apply an open system perspective to show how resources are provided to the organization. The environment is where the club obtains its resources but also where it is restricted if the resources are scarce. One of the core questions when talking of the

environment is whether to look at the environment from the perspective of the organization, as in resource dependency theory, or to look at the organization from the perspective of the environment, as in the population ecology theory (Hatch 1997:86). Hatch argues that cases often fit into several perspectives as these enlighten different aspects of the organizational environment (ibid:97). To analyze the football environment, we find elements from both perspectives to be useful and we use these pragmatically to analyze the environment of FC Midtjylland.

FC Midtjylland has been known for putting up ambitious objectives especially seen in the light of their relatively limited environmental conditions. The club's ambitions about becoming part of the international elite clashes with the scarce resources available. Their location in the relatively sparsely populated area of Jutland, provides only a small pool from which to extract both fans and players. Added to this, the local towns, Herning or Ikast, are not as attractive for players to live in compared to big cities like Copenhagen or Århus.

The resource in the football world is primarily players. The clubs are dependent on gathering talented players from the environment, but rival clubs often have their eyes on the same player. FC Midtjylland has made huge investments to be attractive as a club excelling in developing players. Applying a population ecology perspective, the environment (the players) selects the organization that best serves its needs and demands (ibid:82). Stressing their ability to improve players is an active strategy for FCM to attract resources. The club underlines this ability accentuating the players they have produced through the years and sold to the big leagues. The captain of the Danish national team Simon Kjær is used to attract young talents¹.

The struggle to attract the best talents is intense and Midtjylland has been willing to go to the line and sometimes a little further. This is exemplified in the fines the club has received for signing underaged players against FIFA's rules².

¹Guldminen.dk

² Tipsbladet.dk & (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 31:20)

Environment and leadership:

In the theory of population ecology, the organization is seen as a relatively passive element shaped by the environment and this perspective, we find difficult to reconcile with Midtjylland which we perceive as a club actively maneuvering the environment (Hatch 1997:87). Here Resource Dependency theory instead proves useful as it emphasizes how managers can learn to navigate in the environment (ibid:78). Gary Yukl argues that one of the main objectives of the manager is to be change-oriented (Yukl 2004:76). He also emphasizes the ability to act in the immediate situation (ibid:85). These managerial abilities have been a part of FC Midtjylland's success, allowing them to navigate the environment and establish multiple sources of supply (Hatch 1997:80). A good example of this is when Jens Ørgaard, former CEO for Midtjylland, on a vacation encountered Churchill Oliseh, an African talent manager. This random meeting resulted in a collaboration that led to FCM's academy in Nigeria which has brought many great talents to the club (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 27:00 & 29:58). Another source of supply is the quantified data they gained access to through their British owner, Benham. The data provides information about players that would otherwise have been out of reach.

The relation to other clubs in the football world is somewhat paradoxical; the clubs are at once competitors and collaborators. They battle for resources but also provide resources for each other. They are at the same time rivals and suppliers. Dependency theory contains the element of collaboration useful to describe how partnerships are formed to secure resources for the benefit of both parts (Hatch 1997:80). Midtjylland often loan out young players so they get regular playing time. The young players stay motivated while at their new club and improve before returning to Midtjylland.

In conclusion, FCM has inherent environmental limitations due to its location, which has forced the club to think innovatively. One way they handle this is by promoting themselves on their ability to develop talents into quality players in an attempt to attract resources. They have also actively expanded their possible reach by forming a basis of recruitment abroad in Nigeria, and implemented scouting based on statistics. In addition, FCM form collaborations with other clubs providing resource surplus for both parts.

LEARNING ORGANIZATION:

As discussed in the last section FC Midtjylland expands the resource basis of its environment by using innovative measures. Innovating their approach requires a culture of learning and a willingness to try new things out. Concepts such as creative tension and single and double loop learning will be applied to explore FCM in this context.

Ambitious Visions and Creative Tension

The documentary starts out in the barren landscape known as Heden, in central Jutland. A tour guide of the area explains how these conditions seemed impossible for the moorland peasants to utilize. But thanks to Enrico Dalgas and his establishment of Hedeselskabet, knowledge was secured for the peasants to “think further than till tomorrow” (Oprøret fra heden episode 1 02:24-03:15). The limitations provided by the landscape demanded shrewdness for the inhabitants to succeed. Hedeselskabet made it possible for the farmers to share knowledge, and thereby made planning ahead a possibility. This way of thinking is still present in the area where “people are operational, enterprising and inventive [...] they have big visions out here in central Jutland” (ibid).

By starting the documentary up this way, FCM are building upon this local narrative and drawing on their roots in the local community. Throughout the documentary and on their website, the ability to think innovatively and to be ambitious are presented as key aspects to why FCM has succeeded³. Board chairman Rasmus Ankersen explains on the website that “*the eternal pursuit of progression at every aspect is what impel the club to new heights*”⁴. When the club was founded, they were far from any international relevance. But instead of using one of the traditional Danish designations such as BK (boldklub), or IF (idrætsforening), the international wording FC (football club) was chosen. This indicates that FCM from the beginning, strived to be an actor on the global stage. The ambitious objectives of FCM establishes what Peter M. Senge refers to as creative tension.

³ <https://www.fcm.dk/>

⁴ <https://www.fcm.dk/klubben/>

A clear vision is necessary to cause creative tension (Senge 1990:70). Creative tension is generated in the gap between where the organization is, and where it wants to be (ibid). The tension is resolved either if the vision is lowered, or if the vision is reached (ibid). Senge points out that organizations who learn to master creative tension, learn how to use the energy it generates to move reality toward the visions. The visions set by FCM are what Senge calls positive visions, as they involve aspiration (Ibid:75). An example could be when they pronounced their objective to have two players trained in Midtjylland competing in the World Cup 2010. The ambitious planning is glorified by the management of the club, but it is worth noticing that it also contains downsides: In 2009 goalkeeper Lasse Heinze admitted that the expectations generated a negative pressure on the squad⁵. His comments led to critique from the mental coach for not “possessing the mental qualities necessary to compete in top level football”. FCM wants to have a culture that gets motivated by ambition, not frightened. According to the CEO Claus Steinlein, being ambitious itself attracts those who dream big which he describes with the concept “laws of attraction”⁶.

The importance of a common goal is of great importance, but it is also important to recognize that behind this, there are several different desires, visions and motives (Hvid & Møller 2001:95). Players often have their individual desires of things they want to achieve during their careers, such as playing in one of the big leagues. The management in FCM has to communicate with the players to reconcile the objectives of the organization and objectives of the players. Difficulties might arise between players internally or between the player and the club, when the objectives are incompatible. An example of this is the homegrown talent Mads Thychosen, who has the objective to be a regular starter, but is not able to because the team has bought a new player, who the manager believes in. As a consequence, Thychosen gets frustrated and is later transferred to FC Nordsjælland (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 19:00). This example illustrates that behind a common goal several different motives exist that might be contrary.

⁵ Tipsbladet.dk

⁶ Bt.dk

In conclusion, being ambitious is an important part of the practice and self-perception in Midtjylland (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 23:05). According to Senge these ambitions give rise to creative tension, which provides energy for the objective to be reached. In line with this argument and chairman Rasmus Ankersen, the club have their high ambitions to explain a great part of their success. We find an element not present in the work of Senge, namely that there seems to be some mental requirements to obtain positive effects out of the ambitious objectives. Namely, you need a mindset robust enough to thrive even when expectations are *very* high.

Single and double loop learning:

On their website FCM presents themselves as “the story about a club that from the beginning had the courage to think innovative and step out of the shadows”⁷.

In the chapter about the environment we described how Midtjylland has been able to extend its sources of resources and here innovation has played a vital part. In this chapter we analyze how FCM have gathered knowledge from both within and outside the organization.

In 2004 FCM built their new training academy, the first one on Danish soil. Steinlein and Flemming Broe, the present chief of academy, had been to Nantes, and studied their football academy, which inspired them to establish something similar in FCM (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 13:00). When they came home from Nantes, they sought funding and “got started right away”, calling players while simultaneously trying to find a place for them to live. In this case, they relied partly on information from Nantes, but most knowledge was gained in the process, also known as knowledge by doing (Clegg 2005 :345).

Learning by doing seems key to the organization of FCM as they often launch new initiatives, gaining knowledge in the process. This is described by Steinlein who admits that they do not always rely on thorough analysis before they plunge into projects⁸. Through the years this

⁷ [Fcm.dk](http://fcm.dk)

⁸ Politiken.dk

formula has provided success for the organization, but also letdowns such as the attempts to establish a handball club and a motorsports team. This way of “trying it out” as Steinlein expresses, is a way of gaining knowledge by getting in touch with the unknown (Clegg 2005:363). By constantly trying out new initiatives the organization can avoid the competency trap, which is when an organization excels in one thing, causing blindness towards alternative measures (ibid:351).

The management of FCM plays an important role in how the organization approaches learning and can be defined as a social learning system as it develops knowledge through interaction (ibid:354). There is a clear and distinct idea of what Midtjylland is about and what values the project relies on, which can be interpreted as a sense of joint enterprise (Ibid:356). The members have different functions in the organization, and contribute with different competences, which causes them to attain specific knowledge through their daily work. In the documentary we witness several meetings where the top brass illustrate their personal viewpoint of the situation in the club. An example is when the mental coach BS Christiansen informs that the good period might lead to the players demanding less of each other (Oprøret fra heden Episode 3 05:08). Christiansen’s expertise as a mental coach allows specialized insight in this specific area. The flat structure in the FCM management combined with the presence of many competency spheres, makes it efficient at generating and sharing knowledge. This also resembles Taylors view, that many individuals in the organization possess knowledge that might prove valuable for the organization (Clegg 2005:349). Every member contributes with a specific perspective and view, ultimately new knowledge is produced by means of the exchange which makes it a social learning system (ibid:355).

The innovation of the club was acknowledged by the present British owner, Matthew Benham who mentioned this as the reason why he was willing to invest in the club. Benham is known in the football environment for having developed statistical formulas capable of estimating the result of a football match and revealing undervalued players' potential⁹. Benham believes

⁹ Tipsbladet.dk

that the football world tends to be ineffective and driven by old-fashioned thinking people resistant to any kind of change or innovation¹⁰. This description from Benham portrays the football world as conservative and rigid. Applying the notions of Clegg to his description, the football environment is dominated by single loop learning where the clubs optimize their abilities in line with conventional thinking (Clegg 2005:353). Benham is a proponent for rethinking and innovating the traditional frames, a perspective Clegg defines as double loop learning. Double loop learning involves changing the underlying assumptions which is a difficult task (ibid).

Benham expressed dissatisfaction with the single-loop learning of British clubs and favored FCM for their openness. An example of this double-loop learning is found in the following example.

Erik Rasmussen, coach between 2004-2008, was from Copenhagen and his character differed from the rest of the Jutlandic board members (Oprøret fra heden Episode 3 24:55). He established a very close relation to the players based on capaciousness and caring. These values and what Steinlein calls a “laissez faire style” are described as contrary compared to the rest of the management. The differences caused friction and Rasmussen eventually resigned due to “value issues” with the CEO. But though the partnership wasn’t ideal, some of his approach is still present in the club to this day. The value of seeing “the whole person” as well as the notion of “a family club” is according to Steinlein values descending from Rasmussen (ibid:23:34). The partnership with a person from a different social and cultural background triggered these new insights and it stands as a good example of double loop learning as it entails the modification of the organizations underlying norms, policies and objectives (Clegg 2005:357,353). Using Schein’s framework, the assumptions of the organization are very difficult to change. In the case of Erik Rasmussen, the differences were too great to be mitigated. Despite his departure, the organization still realized the value of some of his insights and adopted them within the organization (Oprøret fra heden episode 3 23:34).

¹⁰ Berlingske.dk

FC Midtjylland has through the years launched several initiatives, many of them uncommon for football clubs in their league. Doing so, the organization has continuously gathered new knowledge, primarily through learning by doing. Analyzing football matches using statistical tools and their willingness to change existing values exemplified with the case of Erik Rasmussen speaks of an organization able to perform double loop learning (Clegg 2005:353). The management consists of several equal members with different competences and thus constitutes a community of practice with great conditions for exchange and development of knowledge.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE:

In this section, we analyze the culture of FCM through Schein's culture framework. This is followed by a brief comparison of cultural values between Denmark and Nigeria, through the lens of Hofstede. The implications these differences have on the organization are discussed in the end of the sector.

Schein's Culture Framework

First, we touch upon the artefacts that we find important in the organization of FCM. Afterwards, we describe the espoused values of the organization. Finally, we present underlying assumptions that have surfaced through our analysis.

The Artifacts of A Football Club in Herning

A brief summary of the most notable structural artefacts would include the training initiatives - both the camp in Nigeria and the youth academy "Guldminen" in Jutland, the physical environment and location of the organization, as well as their investments in mental coaching. Other notable artefacts include the collaborations with other clubs, recruitment of just-legal players and their attempts at starting handball and motorsports departments.

Narratives and heroes - How was your son's party?

Another way of approaching artifacts is to look at what stories and “heroes” are promoted within the organization (Schein 1997:17).

Former CEO Jens Ørgaard explains how he, in the middle of his own speech at his son's confirmation, answers a call from the stadium where there is trouble with the payment terminals. He finishes his speech and leaves the confirmation to help out at the stadium (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 20:27).

Ørgaard tells another story of when he was hospitalized for high blood pressure due to stress (Oprøret fra heden Episode 4 14:43). He was told to rest for a few days at the hospital. After only a brief rest he decided work was more important than rest, got up - ripping the IV drop from his arms - and grabbed a taxi to work.

Multiple board members mention how they have been absent for much of their kids' childhood, because of their passion for FCM and the workload involved (ibid: 20:20).

xG - A Statistical Tool

Finally, we find xG or the expected goals model, to be an interesting artifact. It is an analytical tool the British owner Benham introduced to FCM. During meetings, xG is discussed frequently (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 06:10). The tool helps calculate the expected performance of the team, leading to better results on average.

Sub-conclusion

These artefacts cannot tell us much about the culture at a glance. In order to determine the meaning of the actions, heroes and stories, we need to get an understanding for the organizations *espoused values* (Schein 1997:17).

The Espoused Values of FCM

The following chapter provides an overview of the espoused values of the organization, and how they relate to the artefacts.

“We have to be arrogant, hardworking and do it in a clever way”.

CEO Steinlein (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 34:58)

The quote contains three different statements, which we break down and analyze separately.

The value of “cleverness”, is a part of the self-perception of the organization and builds on a local narrative of middle Jutland, as described in the section *the learning organization*. The value can be seen as expressed in the usage of the tool, xG.

The “arrogance” might be expressed in taking the law to its very limit by pursuing young players, as soon as they reach the legal age. Steinlein turning up at a young players house on his birthday with a cake, shirt and a contract in hand is an example of this (Oprøret fra heden Episode 2 16:15).

The value of “hard work” is exemplified in the myths and heroes from the artefacts section, where stories of hard-working board members are told.

“The one who stops getting better, stops being good.”

CEO Steinlein (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 22:02)

This value is mirrored in the ambitious training programmes the organization has founded. This value reaches further than just the football fields, as the large investments in personal coaching indicate.

The establishment of large training facilities in two countries to train people in-house exemplify this value in practice. Another artifact of the need to improve is by welcoming Benham’s xG model. The statistical tool allows the top brass to improve the management of the club through more informed decision making.

The organization’s many training programmes for all ages, as well as their coaching programmes, seem to indicate that the value of improvement is more than just *espoused* values, but also an *in-practice* value (Schein 1997:21).

The Family Club and the Holistic View

Steinlein mentions several times through the interviews that FCM is a “family club” and that their approach is focused on the “whole person”, which we illuminated with the case of Erik Rasmussen (Oprøret fra heden Episode 3 02:40).

What being a “family club” actually means is never clarified. On their website, they state that “they take care of one another” and form a “binding community” but not much about how this is achieved in practice.¹¹

An artifact that can be tied to this value is the “bodyguard” system (Oprøret fra heden episode 1 6:50). If one gets into a discussion on the field with a rival player, the others have to help break the discussion and backup their teammate.

Regarding the mentioned focus on “the whole person”, it is stressed that their talent programmes are centered not just around abilities on the field, but also need to provide the person with talents and experiences that are useful in other arenas in life. “Guldminen”, has stated they want to produce a Danish prime minister (Guldminen Episode 1). This makes it explicit that the skills learned need to be applicable outside of the football field as well.

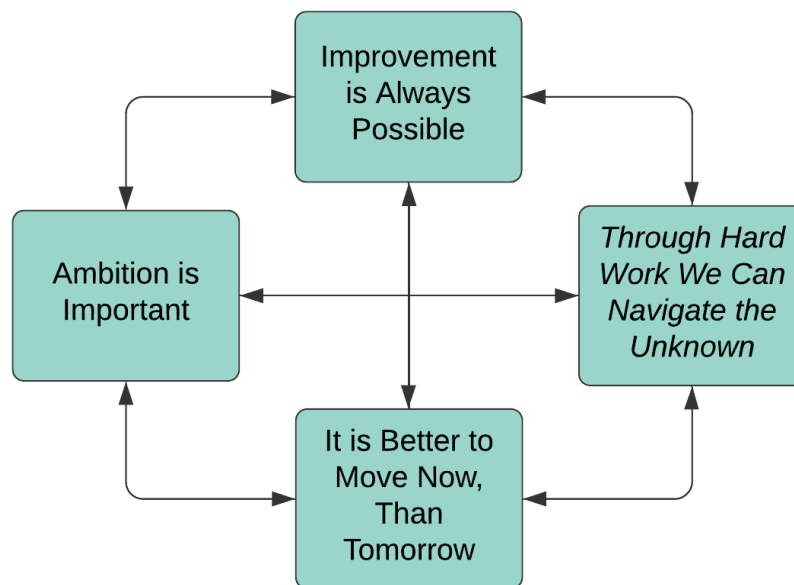
The noted values are thus arrogance, hard work, cleverness, improvement, and community. This brings us to the final part of the analysis, uncovering the underlying assumptions of the organization.

¹¹ Fcm.dk/klubben

The Underlying Assumptions

In order to exactly understand the cultural foundation of the artefacts and values, we need to formulate the deeper maxims they rely on.

The model below illustrates the identified underlying assumptions and their mutual connections. Each assumption is elaborated upon in their own section.



Model 2: underlying assumptions

Improvement is always possible

Espoused values like “The one who stops getting better, stops being good” builds on a logic mechanism that implies that improvement is always possible. The high ambitions set by the management also illustrates the view that improvement, not just as an individual, but as an organization, is always possible. When ambitious goals have been met, more ambitious ones have been formulated (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 22:05).

This assumption indicates a flexible view towards human potential. The limit of a person is their ability to learn new things. This is illustrated not just in values, but also their concrete investments in mental coaching.

Coupling this to the section on single and double loop learning, double loop learning is seen as a source of improvement as double loop learning involves always thinking there is a smarter way of doing things.

This assumption influences their approach to the environment. Double loop learning allows FCM to constantly rethink the possibilities within their environment for tapping previously unused resource potential.

Ambition is important

The ambitious goals set by the management speak of a high importance of ambition within the organization (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 16:25 & 22:05). What has been described as “arrogance” by the CEO can be a way of rephrasing “high ambitions”. The resulting creative tension between where they want to be, and where they are, is considered a major driver in the organization. The ambition does come with some downsides, as there might be a discrepancy between the player level and management level assumptions.

In the creative tension section, the goalkeeper who complained about the high ambitions, was called out by the management for not having the required mindset. This indicates the players, at least in 2009, had yet to fully internalize the assumptions of the management. “Guldminen” develops player-culture and mindset suitable for the organization which will be elaborated on in the discussion. The high workload resulting from high ambitions have crippled the family lives of many of the top managers according to themselves (Oprøret fra heden Episode 1 20:20). While they speak of this fact with pride, it makes it unlikely that someone who values a better family-work life balance would desire to work at the top of the organization. Former coach Erik’s departure from the organization is partly a consequence of this.

It is Better to move now, than Tomorrow

Based on countless new projects, quickly established, and stories told by the CEO, FCM seems to be guided by an assumption, that quick action is better than slow deliberate action. The establishment of a training camp in Denmark immediately after getting the idea is a great example. Acting on an idea as soon as it is visioned can reduce creative tension.

It is made explicit in Steinlein’s statement regarding the training academy, that they prefer to

act in the moment rather than “make a bunch of analyses”. The “learning by doing” approach is connected to this assumption, as swift action does not always allow for careful planning and knowledge gathering beforehand.

While it helps make quick decisive action when necessary, poor planning can jeopardize projects. The failed attempts at starting an office branch in Copenhagen and a handball and motorsports branch stand as concrete examples.

Through hard work we can navigate the unknown

The stated value of hard labor, as well as stories of heroes leaving hospitals and family events to work, is built on a belief that hard work is important and valuable and can help one accomplish any goal.

The attitude indicates most things are possible - if you are willing to work for it. The seemingly endless possibilities fuel a certain fearlessness on the management level. The apparent fearlessness is illustrated when they traveled to Nigeria to invest in youth development, trying to establish a handball club, or buying a Formula car to compete in motorsport, in which they had no experience¹²¹³. Endeavors that might not seem very promising, but were attempted, nonetheless. Naturally not all new projects have been failures and the eagerness to try new projects has certainly brought a lot of good with it.

The failures have not knocked out their desire to learn. This willingness to address new territory with gusto is a part of how FCM acquires knowledge, and helps the organization avoid the competency trap. Combined with high ambitions, it does run the risk of creating a work-culture that undermines the ability to live fulfilling lives outside of the work environment, as illustrated in the section above.

Sub-conclusion

To really understand FCM, it is necessary to know all four underlying values. Without knowing these assumptions, you cannot decipher most of the behavior seen within the organization (Schein 1997:36).

¹² Bmf1.dk

¹³ Tv3sport.dk

These values, and their interrelations are displayed in model 2. The importance of the arrows between each assumption is that one assumption would not explain the behavior in FCM, but it is the combination of the assumptions that is FCM (ibid:37).

Internal integration

After developing an understanding of the underlying assumptions, we must develop an idea of how people are culturally integrated within the organization. This section first analyses national differences between Danish and Nigerian players through works by Hofstede. Afterwards, the way these differences are managed within the organization is analyzed.

DENMARK AND NIGERIA - CULTURAL HETEROGENEITY?

As we have seen earlier, expanding the organization's reach to outside of its local environment, can provide the organization with a new pool of resources. But the international trade of players between not only FCM, but virtually every other football club, has the capacity to provide some new challenges and issues for the organizations (Hofstede 1980:28).

Different nationalities bring with them a variety of cultural backgrounds, resulting in an equal variety of attitudes to everything from how leaders should behave, to whether individual or collective needs are in focus (Hofstede 1990:288). This creates potential for conflict, in an environment experiencing high creative tension.

The story of African Mohamed Zidan illustrates well how cultural differences can make collaboration difficult.

As a part of FCM, Zidan was allowed to pump free gas (Oprøret fra heden Episode 3 12:09). Later, FCM management received a call about Zidan giving free gas to pretty girls at the gas station. When confronted by the coach, he was puzzled as he thought free gas meant he could hand it out as he pleased.

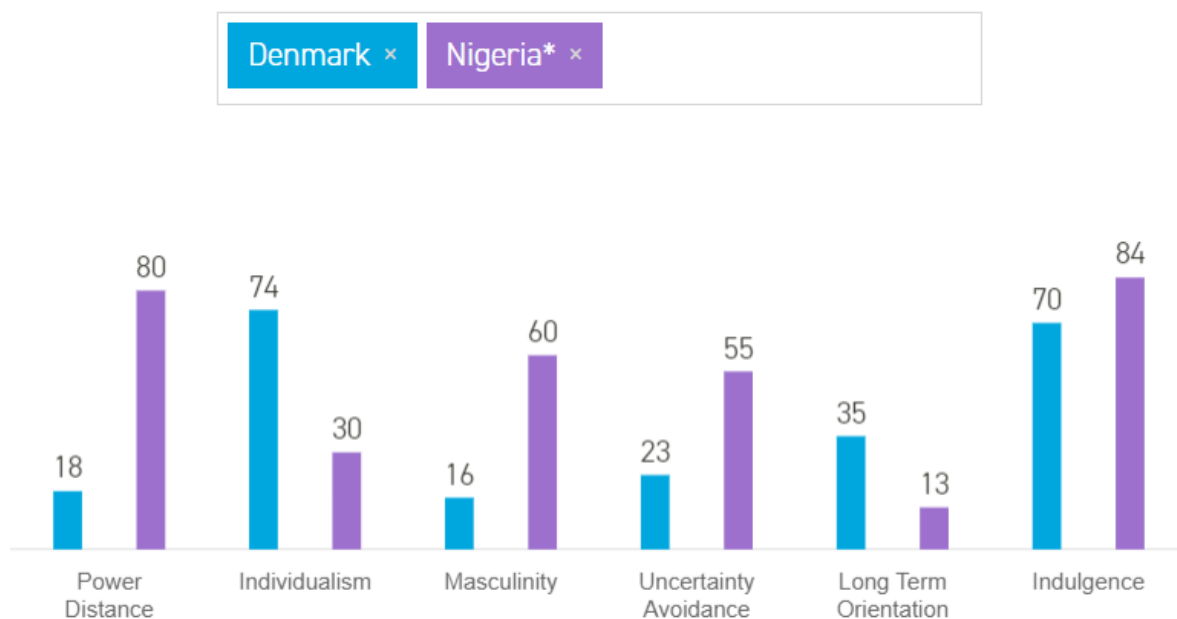
While the gas event is not the reason Zidan was sold, it is a concrete example of the basic cultural differences that exist across borders - and the unexpected issues they bring with them.

For an understanding of more broad cultural differences, we draw upon research by Hofstede.

Hofstede presents six dimensions (2011:8). Power distance (the expected 'distance' to authority figures), individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and finally, indulgence. Similar dimensions have been identified in an organizational context (Hofstede 2011:19).

Studies show that managing these different national attitudes is important for a multinational football team's performance (Maderer et al. 2014). By providing a strong organizational culture, it is possible that FCM can smooth out some of the differences between the various nationalities, allowing better teamwork.

Comparing national attitudes between Denmark and Nigeria, some quite stark differences emerge.



(Graf 1: Source: Hofstede Insights)

The most marked differences are seen in power distance, individualism and masculinity scores. When reporting on these differences, it should be noted that these are national averages, and that football players as a group might express different attitudes.

These differences can be managed through reinforcing a new set of cultural values and assumptions. The high degree of contact between the management and the players allow the

management to shape and guide the culture better, than if they were absent. However, problems can arise from the high difference in expectations to authority figures, as the management has a very informal and personal relation to the players.

Other team members, like mental coach, BS Christiansen, form a sort of cultural glue within the unit, providing cultural guidelines individually and collectively.

His presence can smooth out cultural differences and streamline expectations and mindsets.

Team Building trips, from building challenges in Legoland to survival trips, are carried out to strengthen communication and friendship bonds. Furthermore, teambuilding puts the players in new contexts where the old cultural mores get tested once again (Oprøret fra heden Episode 3 02:10 & 05:47). This allows for cultural integration in a different context, bringing the players closer personally, as well as further reinforcing the values established by the management and the team coach. These actions have a direct influence on the internal integration on a team (Schein 1997:70).

The internationalization of football players has provided unique difficulties to football clubs. Managing differences, as noted in the case between Denmark and Nigeria, must be given priority in organizations seeking effective teams. We find FCM mitigate some of these issues with the use of personal coaching and teambuilding.

DISCUSSION

Methodology

Our analysis of FCM's culture is based on Schein's framework. Schein calls his own methodology "clinical research", where the consultant is hired to work on a specific problem by the organization (Schein 1997:29). This model assumes that culture is best understood when you are trying to change it, and when you have access to ethnographic data (ibid).

Our methodology presents a stark contrast to the actively involved method described above. As we were unable to secure interviews with leading figures within the organization, our analysis is mainly based on material from the Oprøret fra Heden. This is problematic, as we are thus unable to question the visions and values stated by the management and ask

questions about the praxis of the organization. This situation leaves us with a validity issue, as our underlying assumptions are extrapolated from the artefacts and espoused values from the documentary. We are fortunate in that much of the documentary is about the values and culture of the club, but we are naturally left with an incomplete, picture perfect image of the organization.

It is important that our conclusions regarding the underlying assumptions of the organization are read with this in mind.

Retaining Culture

Edgar Schein states that organizations which have a higher level of replacement are more likely not to develop a strong culture (ibid:15). While this might be true, we found that most sports clubs do not share the same fate, even though players and staff get replaced often.¹⁴¹⁵

FCM has as an example had five coaches in the past 9 years. However, the reality shown in the documentary is a very different one, showing a club with a strong and well reinforced culture. Based on our analysis, we find that the management might help carry and reinforce the organization's culture, despite frequent changes in the lower ranks. Especially so, as the managers and higher ups often are with the players (Oprøret fra Heden episode 1 6:35). They tend to hire old players to be part of the coaching staff. This may very well lead to a more strongly manifested culture as most of the staff has been a part of the organizational culture for many years (Oprøret fra heden Episode 4 31:41).

The Postmodern Turn

Most organizations are dependent on customers buying their products, but the football environment must be interpreted a little differently. What is interesting with the football environment is the relation between the clubs as both being rivals and providers of, what we analyzed as the main resource, talented players. One could with a moderate postmodernist scope criticize our analysis for assuming some players to have more talent than others. How

¹⁴ [Wikipedia.org/AGF Fodbold](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AGF_Fodbold)

¹⁵ [Worldfootball.net/brøndby-if](https://worldfootball.net/brøndby-if)

much comes natural and how much is about training is an ongoing debate. FC Midtjylland proclaims on the website of Guldminen that talent is not inborn but instead a result of practice, exercise and maintenance over time¹⁶. But this notion is quite contradictory when looking at their intense approach of obtaining specific talents over time. One would think that if talent is all about practice and exercise and nobody has inborn advantages then, in principle all players would be equally qualified?

Although their characterization of talent on the website of Guldminen seems contradictory to chasing specific “gifted” players, the club also believes that talent is more than merely football skills. Certainly, we find FCM aware of how narratives and language help constitute individual subjects prepared for development (Alvesson 2003:9). This is seen with their emphasis on education of the “whole person”¹⁷.

Developing talents is thereby not just about what takes place on the football pitch but indeed also about building up the individual subject. Here a postmodernist scope could be applied to analyze their use of language and narratives to develop persons. An example of this is the slogan regularly presented for the kids in Guldminen; “Winners never quit, and quitters never win”¹⁸. In the documentary about Guldminen the kids are told time and time again that if they practice hard enough there are no limitations to their talent. Similarly, they are told that ambition is important for their development and the kids has to set objectives for themselves once a week¹⁹. In this manner Midtjylland can be said to construct subjects through language.

To this upcoming generation of players, the high level of ambition is ingrained and thereby episodes like the one in 2009, where the players complained the pressure harmed their performance, are less likely to occur.

By producing individual subjects with certain ideas and values they can be effectively integrated in Midtjylland’s way of running an organization.

¹⁶ Guldminen.dk

¹⁷ Guldminen.dk

¹⁸ Tvmidtvest.dk/Guldminen

¹⁹ Tvmidtvest.dk/Guldminen

Another perspective relevant from postmodernism is the emphasis on how organizational distinctiveness provides stronger membership identification (Alvesson 2003:15). Here it could be interesting to analyze how the distinct self-perception of Midtjylland might have entailed the enthusiastic membership we have described in this paper.

CONCLUSION:

We set out to answer the following question:

What are the cultural cornerstones that shape the organizational development of FC Midtjylland?

Analyzing the environmental conditions of the club, the management of learning and through a three-level culture analysis, we have identified at least four interdependent assumptions that shape and guide the development of the organization and constitute the cornerstones of FC Midtjylland's organizational culture.

The assumption "*improvement is always possible*", applies to all aspects of the organization. On the player level heavy investments are made in player training and coaching. On the management level, the organization engages in double loop learning, which helps to establish new practices and sources of supply.

The assumption "*Ambition is important*" puts an emphasis on high ambitions at all levels of the organization. We find the resulting creative tension creates a drive within the organization which propels it forward to new goals.

The assumption "*It's better to move now than tomorrow*" guide the development of new projects in the club. By acting immediately, the energy emanating from getting the idea is harnessed and learning is created by doing. We find the assumption can have negatively impacted some projects, due to poor planning.

The assumption "*Through hard work we can navigate the unknown*" indicates a hard-working ethos and a belief that success is possible as long as sufficient effort is put in. It is intimately connected to the assumption that it is better to move now than tomorrow. By acting on initiative, new territory is dealt with, and new knowledge is gained in the process. The hard work ethos can have a negative impact on the work life balance of the organization's members.

The cultural integration of these assumptions is secured through active participation of the management, recruitment through internal channels, and investments in team building and coaching.

International differences within the club pose a potential threat to their performance. We find that FCM can mitigate some of the issues through team building and coaching.

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