



Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

Which attitudes do the Aker academy coaches possess towards mental training and their current routines for mental training?

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Preface

This thesis completes my master degree in Science of Sport Management at Molde University College. The project has been challenging, time consuming, but interesting, and is a project that I have learned a lot from, both in terms of the subject itself and hard work. However, the project is not something I could have completed on my own. I want to thank all staff at Molde FK that I got the chance to work with. A special thanks to the coaches that were asked and wanted to participate in this study, as well as Thomas Mork which was my supervisor at Molde FK and helped me with both work and this thesis.

Also, a big thank you to my supervisor Kjell Marius Herskedal for good guidance, help and tips during the project, and that you always answered my questions and had a critical eye that helped improve this thesis in many ways. I would also like to my thank family, my girlfriend and friends that supported me during this period.

Summary

Mental training and sport psychology is a relevant topic in sports, and there is discussion of what is the best practice. Sports organizations now pay more attention to how they can use mental training to develop athletes. This is also the case in football academies. There is, however, limited research on what attitudes, views and beliefs coaches in an academy has towards this topic, and what factors that affect these attitudes. In this study, the goal was to identify the Aker academy coaches' attitudes toward their mental training programme and mental training itself, as well as what has affected their attitudes. To get an understanding of this, the theoretical framework used in this thesis consists of previous research on coaches' attitudes towards mental training, sport psychology services and sport psychology consultants. Motivation theories such as competence motivation theory and Self-determination theory was used to get a deeper understanding of why the coaches possess such attitudes. Theory on leadership and organizational structure was also relevant to get an understanding of factors that could have had an impact on the coaches' attitudes.

To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the coaches. The interview guide was constructed from the literature review to get as relevant and interesting questions as possible, and its purpose was to keep the interview on the right track. However, it was important to not be too locked into the guide, and follow-up questions and probes was included. A thematic content analysis approach was applied to identify themes and eventually findings.

The analysis provided several interesting findings which was placed into three different categories; (1) the coaches' attitudes towards *competence, importance and complexity of mental training*, (2) attitudes towards *methods, routines and communication of mental training*, and (3) attitudes towards *future of mental training in the academy*. The coaches viewed mental training as interesting and important for the players personal and professional development. However, they felt that they lacked knowledge and competence in mental training in the academy. There was also a lack of structure and routines in the academy, according to the coaches. They argued that if a mental training programme were to succeed in the academy, they would need to get help to develop and implementing it from a sport psychology consultant.

Abbreviations

LDI - Life Development Intervention

MFK - Molde Football club (Molde Fotballklubb)

NTF - Norwegian top football (Norsk Toppfotball)

PETTLEP model - Physical, Environment, Task, Timing, Learning, Emotions, Perspective

PMAE - Pyramid Model of Athletic Excellence

PST - Psychological Skills Training

RPE - Rating of Perceived Exertion

SDT - Self-determination theory

SP - Sport psychology

SPARC-2 - Sport Psychology Attitudes Revised Coaches

SPC - Sport psychology consultant

SPS - Sport psychology services

SPSD - Sport Psychology Service Delivery

UEFA - Union of European Football Associations

VR - Virtual reality

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1.0 Introduction and background

Mental training and sport psychology in football is a field that has had an increased focus and interest over the last years. This is evident in various studies on the topic as well as academy classification systems. Some researchers have even made suggestions that mental skills of an elite athlete can be what sets them apart from athletes on lower levels (Toering et al., 2012; Leonardsen, 2014). This has awakened interest from sport teams, athletes and researchers all over the world. If mental skills could be such an important factor between “failure” and “success”, it goes without saying that mental training should get more attention amongst professional athletes, as well as aspiring youngsters that want to reach elite level. Some mental skills related to sport seems to come more natural for some people than others (Leonardsen, 2014), but luckily there are studies that suggest athletes on different stages in their careers can improve mental skills through training (Visek et al., 2013; Montgomery et al., 2018; Gracz et al., 2007; Diment, 2014). Well-known techniques such as imagery, self-talk, goal-setting, and relaxation techniques amongst others, are techniques that athletes can use to increase their confidence, handle stress and pressure, be more focused and concentrated, improve self-regulation skills, and handle adversity (Olympiatoppen.no, 2019; Montgomery et al., 2018, Visek et al, 2013., Diment, 2014). As these different skills are improvable, and argued to be important factors to develop as an athlete, it is important to identify how sport organizations can implement methods or mental training programs into their day-to-day practice. Others suggest that players wellbeing and authenticity is more important though (Nesti, 2004). Through counselling and working with sport psychology consultants, players are more prepared to deal with life-changing challenges, and truly know their own identity, which again can lead to better performances in the long-term (Nesti, 2010; Danish et al., 1993).

1.1 The academy classification – football mentality

Talent development in Norway took a directional change in 2017 when the academy classification report was introduced by Norwegian Top Football (NTF) (Olafsen, 2017). Football clubs from the two highest divisions in Norway participates in the classification by free will, and use this classification system as a tool to maintain an overview of- and improve their youth talent development departments, or academies. Clubs participating are evaluated

in ten different sections with 195 underlying categories on how their current state of operations measures up to given standards, and clubs get financial support based on how they score compared to the other clubs in the classification (Olafsen, 2019). *Football mentality* is an underlying category in the section *training processes*. Most clubs in the classification got a relative low score in this category both in 2017 and in 2019 (Olafsen, 2017; 2019).



Figure 1 NTF's football mentality characteristics (Olafsen, 2019).

In collaboration with sport psychologist Geir Jordet, NTF have worked out these 11 areas, which together form the category football mentality in the academy classification report; (1) express own identity, (2) regulates total workload, (3) self-regulates learning, (4) passionately embracing play, (5) willingness to succeed, (6) handles relations, (7) handles adversity, (8) master new contexts, (9) handles pressure, (10) Perceptual and cognitive control of the game, (11) handles success (Olafsen, 2019; Jordet, 2019). These areas are mental characteristics, or demands that describes what it takes to be an elite athlete, and are based on research on top football players around Europe. The model provides young players areas of which they need to work on to succeed, and can be used as a guide for coaches to identify players with big potential. The model will further in the study be referred to as “The Geirs 11 Model”, as this is what they have named it in Molde Football Club.

Molde Football Club's academy, the Aker academy, has in collaboration with Geir Jordet, developed a mental training tool based on “The Geirs 11 Model”. This tool is used to map out their players' mental skills. The tool works as a questionnaire, which the academy coaches hand out to their players to measure different aspects of football mentality that are evident in “The Geirs 11 Model”. Based on the information the academy coaches get from

this questionnaire, it seems like a good tool to get an overview of their players' mental skills. How the coaches are supposed to use and work with this information seem somewhat unclear. The described tool will further be referred to as "The Geirs 11 Tool", as that is how the staff in the Aker academy referred to it.

2.0 The Aker academy's context and research question

To get a better understanding of the research question, and its importance and relevancy, a description of the Aker academy's context will be provided. There are several factors that have had an impact on the academy's organization and routines, making this an interesting case, as it may be relevant for other football academies and sport organizations as well.

2.1 Context

The Aker academy has been under multiple managerial changes over the last few years. In three years, they have had three different academy leaders, which have impacted the academy's daily operations, structures and plans. Participating in NTFs academy classification programme has also affected the Aker academy to do certain changes. As mentioned, academies are classified and compensated on how they run based on NTFs demands and guidelines. The latest evidence of this, is the Aker academy's desire to improve their mental training. This change is, however, not only to score better in the academy classification. The academy management has expressed that the academy view mental training as important, and something they want to develop further.

There exists many different approaches and focus areas when it comes to mental training and sport psychology, which makes it a challenging and complex area to implement. Coaches in the academy play a vital role when it comes to carrying out the programme, therefore it can be beneficial for the Aker academy to identify the coaches' knowledge, views and attitudes towards mental training and sport psychology, as well as how they view their existing routines concerning mental training. It may also helpful to identify their motivations to work with mental training.

2.2 Research problem and overall aim of thesis

For this thesis, the overall aim is to get an understanding of what tools and routines the Aker academy use for mental training, and the coaches attitudes towards them. Further, identifying the coaches' attitudes towards mental training in general will be important for how the Aker academy will take the next step with mental training. Getting an understanding of why the coaches has these attitudes will be analysed through literature connected to the academy's context, and motivation theories. Most studies on coaches' attitudes towards mental training and sport psychology seems to focus on coaches from different clubs and organizations. There are few studies that explores coaches' attitudes, beliefs, and views on mental training within one club or organization. It would therefore be interesting to explore the Aker academy coaches' views, attitudes and beliefs towards mental training and sport psychology.

After discussions with the academy leader, mental training is something that they want to improve and implement in their day-to-day practice. To implement such methods, it would be helpful to identify the academy coaches' attitudes, beliefs and knowledge, how the coaches work with mental training, how devoted the coaches are to implement new methods, as well as potential challenges to do so. What they think of their existing tools and routines, and what they believe should be done to improve mental training will be discussed to get an understanding of the main research question;

Which attitudes do the Aker academy coaches possess towards mental training and their current routines for mental training?

Answering this question will give the Aker academy a foundation from which they can build their mental training programme on. It can also provide other academies who want to develop a mental training programme insight to what coaches of a professional football academy think about mental training, and which concerns to consider when construction and implementing such a programme.

3.0 Theory and literature review

This chapter explains relevant theory, and research on coaches' attitudes, beliefs and views on mental training and sport psychology. Theory on motivation will be presented to get a better understanding for why coaches possessed the attitudes that they had. Further, various approaches, techniques and methods will be presented to get an overview of how mental training and mental training programs can look like. Additionally, leadership approaches and leadership styles will be discussed to identify factors that could have had an impact on the coaches' attitudes. The potential benefits and disadvantages of organizational structure and job descriptions will also be presented.

3.1 Attitudes towards psychology in football

Attitudes towards sport psychology has traditionally been studied from the athletes' perspective as receivers of mental or psychological skills training (PST) (Zakrajsek and Zizzi, 2007; Martin et al., 2012; Zakrajsek et al., 2011; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). This is not surprising as they are the ones that need to adopt such skills to improve performance. However, getting an understanding of coaches and leaders knowledge and opinions of PST is important to most successfully implement PST programs (Freitas et al., 2013). Reasons for why coaches' attitudes towards this subject is viewed as important is that coaches can have a big influence on players' perception of sport psychology and mental training (Martin et al., 2012; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013; Halerman et al., 2020; Freitas et al., 2013). Using their influence among the players, coaches can encourage players to participate in PST, as well as reaching out to a sport psychology consultant (SPC) if needed. Coaches attitudes and opinions can eventually become cultural norms in the team, and the acceptance will overcome potential stigmas (Halerman et al., 2020).

3.1.1 Athlete challenges

Having a PST programme can be beneficial for young athletes, as it can help them grow personally and it can provide them with the mental toughness they need to thrive in their sport (Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013). However, athletes that also are students face not only challenges connected to sports. Student-athletes face challenges, demands and expectations at school and in their sport, as well as from friends and family, which can be

too much for someone. If they experience it as too much, it can lead to mental health issues as unhealthy anxiety and depression (Halerman et al., 2020). Halerman and colleagues (2020) also reports that student athletes use counselling and psychological services at a lower rate than non-athlete students do. This might be an issue as student-athletes arguably face more challenges and pressure than what non-athletes do. Additionally, coaches reported that they have limited knowledge of mental health issues (Halerman et al., 2020).

However, coaches did believe that they were good at notifying if something was wrong amongst athletes. When they notice that something is wrong or different with athletes, they would check in on the athlete, teammates, or other coaches and staff that were close to the athlete. They also argued that they were willing to refer players to a SPC if the problem was too much for them to handle (Halerman et al., 2020). To be more prepared for this potential challenge, one consultant in Chase's (2011) article on PST suggested that PST programs should be combined with counselling to work with mental health, as well as increasing performance. Performance enhancement techniques and consulting services can enhance athletes' well-being as well as dealing with stress and anxiety both professionally and life in general (Chase, 2011; Camiré and Trudel, 2013).

It is therefore important to address coaches' attitudes towards psychology as they have a big influence on players, they are some of the people that spends the most time with them, and are most likely responsible, or have the biggest influence on the mental development amongst the players.

3.1.2 Sport Psychology Attitudes Revised Coaches – SPARC-2

Researchers has relied much on the framework known as Sport Psychology Attitudes-Revised (SPA-R), developed from Martin and colleagues (2002) to understand athletes' attitudes towards sport psychology. However, the increased interest in coaches' attitudes towards sport psychology led researcher to adopt a new framework. To study coaches' attitudes towards sport psychology, Zakrajsek and Zizzi (2007) developed the SPA-R framework into the Sport Psychology Attitudes Revised Coaches (SPA-RC), later further developed and referred to as SPARC-2 (Halerman et al., 2020).

Table 1. SPARC-2 Subscales and Items

Stigma Tolerance	
	I would not want a SPC working with my athletes because other coaches would think less of me.
	I would feel uneasy having a SPC work with my athletes because some people would disapprove.
	If I utilized a SPC to help me coach better, I would not want other coaches to know about it.
	Having seen a SPC is bad for an athlete's reputation.
	I would not want someone else to know about my athletes receiving help from a SPC.
	If my athletes worked with a SPC, I would not want other coaches to know about it.
	I would think less of my athletes if they went to a SPC.
Confidence in SPC	
	A SPC can help athletes improve their mental toughness.
	If an athlete on my team asked my advice about personal feelings of failure related to sport, I would recommend that he/she see a SPC.
	I would like to have the assistance of a SPC to help me better understand my athletes.
	I feel that an athlete with emotional problems during sport performance would feel most secure in receiving assistance from a SPC.
	If I was worried or upset about my athletes' performance, I would want to get help from a SPC.
	I think a SPC would help my athletes perform better under pressure.
	A SPC could help my athletes fine-tune their performance.
	At times I have felt lost and would have welcomed professional advice for a personal problem.
Personal Openness	
	A good idea for an athlete to avoid personal worries and concerns is to keep one's mind on the job.
	There is something respectable in the attitude of athletes who are willing to cope with their conflicts and fears without resorting to professional help.
	Athletes emotional difficulties tend to work themselves out in time.
	Athletes with a strong character can get over mental conflicts by themselves.
	Athletes should know how to handle problems without needing assistance from a SPC.
Cultural Preference	
	If I were to hire a SPC, I would take into account his/her race or ethnicity.
	There are great differences between people of different races or ethnicities.
	My athletes would be more comfortable with a SPC if he/she were of the same race or ethnicity as them.
	I would be more comfortable with a SPC if he/she were the same race or ethnicity as I am.
	An athlete may relate best to a SPC if he/she were the same race or ethnicity.
	I would be more comfortable hiring a SPC if he/she were from the same cultural background as my athletes.

Figure 3.1 SPARC-2 framework (Halerman et al., 2020).

The SPARC-2 is a questionnaire that addresses four different items; Stigma Tolerance, Confidence in Sport Psychology Consultants (SPC), Personal Openness, and Cultural Preference (Zakrajsek and Zizzi, 2007; Halerman et al., 2020). The questionnaire's four items consists of 26 underlying subscales, which should give researcher a good understanding of coaches' attitudes towards sports psychology services (Halerman et al., 2020; Zakrajsek and Zizzi, 2007).

This framework has been used to identify coaches' attitudes towards sport psychology services (SPS) and consultants, especially in quantitative studies (Martin et al., 2012; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013; Zakrajsek et al., 2011; Zakrajsek and Zizzi, 2007, 2008). It has however also been used in a qualitative study (Halerman et al., 2020). This suggests that the framework with its questions, can be useful when exploring the Aker academy coaches' attitudes towards sport psychology, SPS's and SPC's, at least in some aspects such as stigma tolerance and personal openness.

3.1.3 Coaches Characteristics

It is previously reported that older coaches with more experience and higher education are more positive to sport psychology services than their counterparts (Michel, 2013; Smedley, 2013; Martin et al., 2012). Older coaches with more education, and more years of coaching experience were more open to SPS's. They were less likely to stigmatize and more confident in consultation than younger coaches with less experience (Martin et al., 2012; Michel, 2013). A possible explanation to this is that younger coaches are less experienced and less secure in their jobs, and might not be aware of how little they know about sport psychology (Martin et al., 2012). Results from studies using the tool SPARC-2, indicated that previous experience with sport psychology was the most persistent element influencing coaches' attitudes, expectations, and usage of sport psychology skills and services. Coaches with previous experience with sport psychology was more open to it, less likely to stigmatize it, and have more realistic expectations to results and processes than coaches with no previous experience (Martin et al., 2012). Previous experience with sport psychology and sport psychology consultants will have an impact on coaches' perceptions of its effectiveness and their expectations. Positive experiences will lead to better perceptions of sport psychology services, while negative experiences lead to worse expectations. Coaches with positive experience will more likely engage in continuous sport psychology services (Michel, 2013).

Situational characteristics such as type of sport also has an impact. If it is a contact sport or non-contact sport, team sport vs individual sport, the level of competitions, and sport subculture, are all factors that can impact participants' attitudes, beliefs and receptivity to sport psychology services. For example, contact sports that has a masculine subculture might not be very receptive of such services (Martin et al., 2012). It is argued that workshops that teach coaches psychological skill training techniques increase interest and motivation to engage with sport psychology. However, after a few weeks the interest might drop off if techniques are not implemented in a structured training programme (Michel, 2013).

3.1.4 Performance enhancement vs. counselling

Evidence from previous research shows that coaches generally view SP and SPC as essential and important (Halerman et al., 2020; Freitas et al., 2013; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013). Some coaches even argue that it is on the same level of importance as strength and

conditioning (Halerman et al., 2020). However, coaches seem to be more positive towards sport psychology if it leads to better performances using techniques such as imagery, goal-setting, and self-talk, rather than focusing on personal matters through counselling (Michel, 2013; Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013). It is interesting how coaches view SP as a tool to maximize personal potential, enhance performance, and coach more effectively (Halerman et al., 2020). This might of course be due to the footballs nature of constant pressure on succeeding in the short term and winning (Kelly, 2008; Arnulf, 2011), but as an academy is supposed to develop players and not just focus on winning, it might be important to focus on players' mental health through for example counselling and not only on performance enhancement techniques (Chase, 2011).

3.1.5 Expectations to SPC and SPS

Coaches reported that they view themselves as important when it comes to carrying out a PST programme (Freitas et al., 2013). However, they also reported that they do not feel confident enough on their current knowledge to conduct regular PST programs (Freitas et al., 2013; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). This suggests that coaches might need help from SPC's to either integrate a PST programme, or teach them about SP so they can feel more confident to conduct such a programme. Therefore, it is a good thing that coaches acknowledge SPC's role and view them as important (Halerman et al., 2020; Freitas et al., 2013). According to Camiré and Trudel (2013), empirical evidence even suggests that coaches prefer to receive help or assistance from a consultant when learning and implementing psychological skills in their sport organization. Getting help from consultants might solve the most mentioned barrier to carry out a PST programme, namely lack of knowledge. Learning from a professional will help the coaches get awareness of psychological skills and performance enhancement techniques, as well as help with counselling. Consultants can either teach coaches how to conduct counselling, or they might be hired by the club (or sport organization) to be responsible for counselling.

Even though coaches seem to have positive perceptions of SPC's, they do have some expectations towards them. Being supportive, reliable and competent within their field are characteristics that are often mentioned by coaches when asked what they expect from SPC's (Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). Coaches would also prefer if the consultant had sport-related knowledge, as it would be easier to connect (Freitas et al., 2013).

When implementing a PST programme, the coaches need support from the SPC as they often lack knowledge of how to implement the programme on their own. That is why it is important that the consultant is reliable, so the coach and the consultant can trust each other during their cooperation. For the PST programme to be successful, the coaches and consultant need to be on the same page. It would help if they agree on the methodology and overall goals before they carry out the programme (Halerman et al., 2020). It also seems as coaches want to continuously be provided with material and strategies during the PST programme. When discussing material and articles, the coaches preferred summaries rather than full articles, as they felt they did not have time to read the articles thoroughly (Camiré and Trudel, 2013). Along with material and strategies on SP, Camiré and Trudel (2013) noticed that coaches wanted feedback from consultants during the programme, as they wanted to learn as much as possible while carrying out the programme.

When it comes to SPS's, coaches argued the necessity of services being available based on the unique schedule of football. The programme needs to be available all year around, while coaches have the ability to dictate time and place for services (Halerman et al., 2020). It also needs to provide value, coaches argued that they needed to see results. They claimed that the programme should be used to evaluate players, maintaining stability, giving their teams an advantage or setting themselves apart (Halerman et al., 2020). This is why selling the programme is an important key for the consultants. The better they communicate the programme and the long-term objectives, the more likely the whole organization will dive into the programme and commit (Chase, 2011). Communication and having the whole coaching staff on board seems to be some of the most important keys to successfully implement a PST programme. First of all, the consultants need to communicate what coaches can expect from such a programme. This is because many coaches do not know what to expect from such programs, or they have too high expectation (Chase, 2011).

It is also important to address what the consultant expects from the coaches in terms of participation in the programme and its sessions. Participating in the sessions can be important for four reasons: (1) if a coach participates, he/she would get the same information as the players, (2) it gives the coach knowledge of mental skill training that he/she can use later when the consultant is not there, (3) it enhances the credibility of the programme, and (4) from the support from the coach, the connection between the players and the consultant will improve (Chase, 2011). When coaches reflected over characteristics, attributes and

skills that they thought they needed to possess on their own, they mentioned specific techniques and other psychological attributes such as self-talk skills (technique) as well as honesty, responsibility, intelligence, passion, and ability to deal with players (attributes) (Freitas et al., 2013).

3.1.6 Challenges to implement PST programs

Consultants and coaches that do want to implement PST programs might face different sorts of challenges. The biggest and most important may be getting players on board. Athletes may fear they will be viewed as “head cases”, and that something is wrong with them if they work with a SPC and SP (Gould and Damarjian, 1998; Freitas et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2012; Michel, 2013). This can be connected to historical stigmas towards SP as both coaches and athletes traditionally had negative attitudes towards SP (Martin et al., 2012). Consultants has reported facing such stigmas as they fight the stereotypical “shrink” image to be fully accepted in sport (Gould and Damarjian, 1998; Freitas et al., 2013; Smedley, 2013). However, coaches can help to overcome such stigmas, as the coaches can influence the willingness to integrate sport psychology services and mental skills into the daily operations, and the players training days. Research shows that the coach-athlete relationship is extremely powerful, meaning the coaches can have a big influence on players’ attitudes and expectations towards sport psychology services and mental training (Martin et al., 2012). Labelling psychological help as “mental skill training”, and consultants as “mental skill coaches” or “performance enhancement consultants” rather than using psychology in the terms may increase the chance for athletes to seek help from sport psychology professionals without fear of judgement (Martin et al., 2012). Addressing the potential benefits of sport psychology may also help to overcome such stigmas (Smedley, 2013; Halerman et al., 2020).

The most discussed roadblock to implementing PST programs is the lack of knowledge on the subject amongst coaches (Freitas et al., 2013; Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Smedley, 2013; Gould and Damarjian, 1998). Halerman and colleagues (2020) reported that coaches felt that there is a lack of knowledge among coaches and players of what sport psychology really is, and even though coaches view PST as important, many coaches did not know how to implement it. This was also the case of SPC’s, as not all coaches know what a SPC do and how they operate as well as where they work. Many of

the coaches' beliefs about SP even turned out to be untrue, and were misperceptions (Halerman et al., 2020). The lack of knowledge can be a big challenge when implementing PST programs, as Camiré and Trudel (2013) noticed that there was a lack of openness when they helped coaches implement PST programme. This was however related to some coaches' initial willingness to participate, and as they eventually increased their knowledge during the project, they were more positive.

Time and resources are also regularly mentioned as potential roadblocks for PST programme implementation. Time constrains and budget restrictions are often determined by administrators or athletic directors, and the restrictions can have a negative impact on usage of sport psychology services (Smedley, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013; Halerman et al., 2020). Even tough effects of sport psychology are known and favoured, lack of funding is a big reason why some sport organizations do not invest in sport psychology services (Smedley, 2013). This might lead coaches to feel that there is a lack of availability of sport psychology services as factors such as time and money plays a vital role. Some of these services might not be feasible, and it might be a lack of services in the area. In terms of time, youth coaches often have limited time with their athletes and may prioritize technique and skill development rather than mental skill training (Smedley, 2013). It can be challenging for the coaches to balance professional, personal and coaching obligations and finding time to participate in SP projects (Camiré and Trudel, 2013). Flexibility among sport psychology consultants is also a concern among coaches (Halerman et al., 2020).

3.2 Motivation theories

To get a deeper understanding of why the individual coaches possess their attitudes and beliefs towards sport psychology, their willingness to engage in sport psychology and mental training, motivation theory will be adopted. There are various motivation theories applied in sport and in the workplace. Theories that are included in this study are amongst the most common when trying to understand peoples' motivation to engage in activities or tasks.

3.2.1 Competence motivation theory

Robert White (1959) is seen as the precursor of the competence motivation theory, as he addressed peoples need for competence. In his theory, he proposed a definition to the term

effectance as peoples' impulse or intrinsic need to have an impact on their environment (White, 1959). If people experience success in influencing their environment they will receive intrinsic rewards such as feelings of efficacy and enjoyment. This leads them to chase these intrinsic rewards and they will continue to show such effectance efforts. However, White's theory was further developed by Susan Harter (1978). She built further on the principle that enjoyment and intrinsic rewards was the motivation to face and deal with the environment.

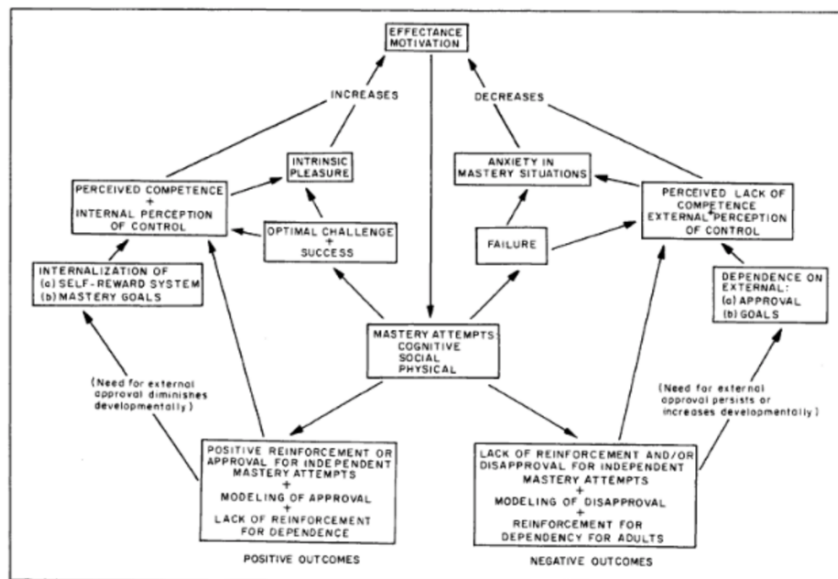


Figure 3.2 Development refinement and extension of White's model of effectance motivation (Harter, 1978. P. 38)

Harter (1978) argues that peoples effectance can differ from various elements such as cognitive, physical and social. People will be motivated to establish or develop their competence by engaging in mastery attempts within each element. When people are successful in their attempts as they face an optimal challenging task, and they receive socio-emotional support or feedback from significant individuals while performing such tasks, they will sense feelings of competence (Harter, 1978). The more competent an individual perceive themselves, the higher competence motivation they will have, as their perceived competence leads to good feelings and enjoyment. In contrast, if a person fails when attempting to face an optimal challenge, or there is lack of feedback and reinforcement from significant individuals, they will view themselves as less competent (Harter, 1978). This can lead to anxiety and shame, as well as decreased competence motivation. The fact that success in such challenges leads to higher perceived competence and motivation might not come as

a surprise, but the importance of feedback and reinforcement might not be common knowledge. For significant social agents, say a manager, it is important to give feedback to subordinates both when they are successful and unsuccessful. Giving feedback and acknowledgement to successful subordinates will give them higher competence motivation to keep on going and work more independent in the future (Harter, 1978). For the unsuccessful, feedback and reinforcement might lead them on the right track anyway as they can get guidance and motivation to keep on facing challenges. This theory is relevant to this study as the coaches in the Aker academy is facing potential work tasks and challenges that they might not feel competent enough to deal with. People are attracted to participate in activities and challenges that they feel confidence and competence to solve. Understanding the coaches perceived competence on the topic can help the management to offer the right feedback to motivate them to face the future challenges that will appear. When they feel that they get the right feedback, such as support or reinforcement, they can be motivated to continue facing challenges. By understanding their perceived competence, the management will also get an understanding of what is optimal challenges for the coaches when it comes to mental training.

3.2.2 Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) considers people's motivation to do different activities, why people enjoy doing different activities, and what is needed to stay determined to do an activity. The theory itself can be employed in all sorts of areas, and has been used to understand human motivation in fields such as leadership, education, health services, and sports (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). This macro-theory is used to understand human's psychological needs that are the foundation for their self-motivation and growth. The self-determination theory will provide a better understanding of how motivation works, how it can be improved, and how the coaches are motivated to engage in mental training and sport psychology. The theory can be used to get an understanding for why the coaches view the existing methods and routines as they do.

3.2.2.1 Competence, relation and autonomy

As mentioned, the SDT is based on humans' psychological needs. The foundation of this theory is built of three basic psychological needs, which are; Competence, Relation, and

Autonomy. All these needs should be met for a person to function optimally. If all these needs are met, it is more likely that a person will be in a state where there is a higher probability that they will grow, integrate, thrive, as well as staying motivated which leads to higher efforts (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In addition, there is argued that this approach will maintain peoples physical and psychological well-being. This suggests that there needs to be an environment where coaches build relations amongst each other and with their superiors. They need to be able to use their strengths as well as working on their weaknesses to develop their competence. It also suggests that coaches need to feel a sense of autonomy in their development. This can for example be done by being included in developing the mental training programme, making suggestions, and other initiatives.

3.2.2.2 Autonomous vs. controlled motivation

The SDT distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation. It suggest that the autonomy-based motivation is preferable, as people that has this type of motivation while doing an activity, are committed to the activity and are doing it with free will, willingness and choice (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). Autonomy-based motivation is often associated with intrinsic motivation whereas the person has their own interest and/or enjoyment of the activity being performed. However, Deci and colleagues (2017) suggests that activities that sometimes demands extrinsic motivation factors can lead to autonomous motivation under the right circumstances. This can be done by making the coaches see the value or the importance of doing a certain activity that seems boring or unnecessary, but eventually will help the players develop. In addition, if coaches are able to feel ownership, they need to get constructive feedback and support. This will lead to increased level of autonomous motivation. The other type of motivation, controlled motivation, is the opposite of autonomous motivation. Typical examples of controlled motivation are through rewards, treats, and other extrinsic motivational factors (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to the SDT this sort of motivation will lead to lower effort and short term gains.

3.2.2.3 Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation

Another important aspect of the SDT is intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. When a person is doing an activity from their own interest, will, and enjoyment, the person is intrinsically motivated. In contrast, if a person is being forced to do an activity, or is rewarded for doing

an activity they do not have an interest in, they would operate with an extrinsic motivation (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). As in the case of doing an activity with autonomy is preferable, the same is the case with intrinsic motivation. Deci and colleagues (2017) suggest that workers can be intrinsically motivated in their jobs, at least parts of their jobs, which will make them perform better and enjoy their jobs more. If coaches have intrinsic motivation in most activities, they can increase their performance and enjoyment, but it is the management responsibility to facilitate such an environment. If coaches perform an activity to achieve a separate outcome, they are extrinsically motivated. Examples of extrinsic motivation are material rewards, money, gifts, or non-material such as praise, compliments, and fame (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017). Such extrinsically motivations can lead to increased performance, but it is more effective in the long-term if coaches in some degree get the chance to act with autonomy and being intrinsically motivated (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017).

3.3 Approaches to mental training

It exists many different approaches for working with mentality in sport. The mentioned model from NTF provides clubs areas they should work on to develop mental skills among players. Olympiatoppen also have a mental training model, but it consists of fewer elements. The model starts out with four mental basis techniques; goal-setting, relaxation, visualizing, and self-talk (Olympiatoppen.no, 2019). These basis techniques work on skills such as self-confidence, excitement regulation, motivation, concentration, stress mastery. Using the techniques will help the athletes to master the mental skills, which will be useful in competition/match preparations. The mentioned skills can be developed to show results in short-term, as it seems that it does not take too much time to implement them. These are well studied and documented as performance-enhancing methods after being performed over a short period of time.

There also exist methods that does not necessarily show results in the short-term, but can be helpful for athletes over a duration of time. Methods that improve life-skills can be important, as many of the players will not reach a professional level, and would have to prepare for a life outside sport. Players that do become good enough and reach elite level would also benefit from learning life skills, as they also might either face other challenges outside the field, or ending their careers in unforeseen ways like injuries or illness (Podlog,

2016; Bolter and Weiss, 2016; Jones, 2012). Following different approaches to mental training will be presented, and give an insight of how programmes can look like. This will give a better understanding of what the Aker academy are doing now, and what they can do in the future.

3.3.1 The Sport Psychology Service Delivery (SPSD)

In 1998, Poczwardowski and colleagues developed this model to better understand how consultants could execute a mental training programme, and what elements that are important for doing so.

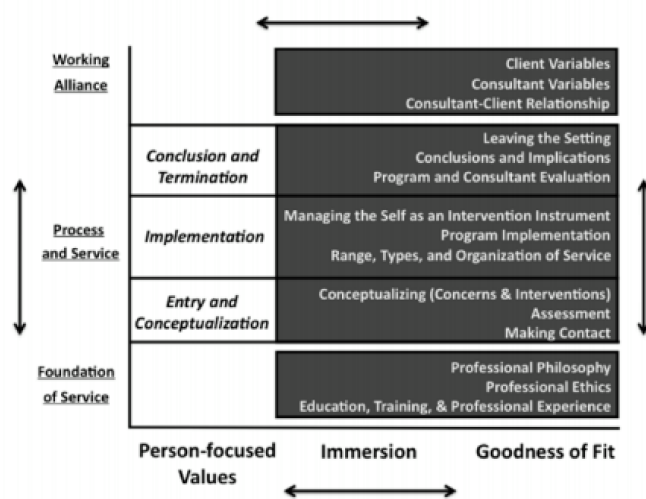


Figure 3.3 The Sport Psychology Service Delivery model (Poczwardowski and Sherman, 2011, P.528).

The three main pillars in this model are positioned on the left hand side, which are (1) Foundation of Service, (2) Process of Service, and (3) Working Alliance. Foundation of Service include three underlying factors: professional philosophy of the consultant, the professionals' ethics, and their education, training and professional experience. These factors set the foundation of the consultant, and what services they confidently can bring. After setting the foundation, they move over to the Process of Service. The first step in this phase is Entry and Conceptualization. This is where the consultant makes contact and assessment, and conceptualizing athletes' potential interventions and concerns. The second step is the implementation. In this step there are also three underlying elements, which are range, types and organization of service, the implementation of the programme, and managing the self as an intervention instrument.

After defining what the programme should include and implementing it, they move on to the last step, Conclusion and Termination. This step also has three underlying elements which are to evaluate the programme and consultant, conclusions and implication, and then, leaving the setting (Aoyagi and Poczwardowski, 2016; Poczwardowski and Sherman, 2011). This was the original model, but after revision of the model, Poczwardowski and Sherman (2011) identified an important category that they added to the model; the Working Alliance. This category includes the relationship between the clients and the consultant, the consultant variables, and the client variables. The category was included as they saw that the consultants argued that it is important with a mutual trust to be effective. They saw that the consultants felt a need to include the clients as much as possible and participate to have a more productive process. The consultant variables were identified as the consultant ability to invest in the consultant-client relationship, liking the client and being easy to relate to, genuine interest in sport and competition, the ability to observe and read people, professional skills and abilities, personal qualities, and awareness of own needs. The client variables were identified as personality and personal history, maturity, age and expertise level, ethnicity and gender, invested and willing to work on issues (Poczwardowski and Sherman, 2011). This model illustrates how sport organizations can work with consultants to implement mental training.

3.3.2 A Pyramid Model of Athletic Excellence

This model is constructed to prepare athletes for optimal performance through different psychological techniques and processes (Harmison and Casto, 2012). As athletes, like other people, are multidimensional and complex, they are influenced by physical, technical, tactical, as well as psychological factors. Athletes also need to handle environmental and contextual variables (Harmison and Casto, 2012).

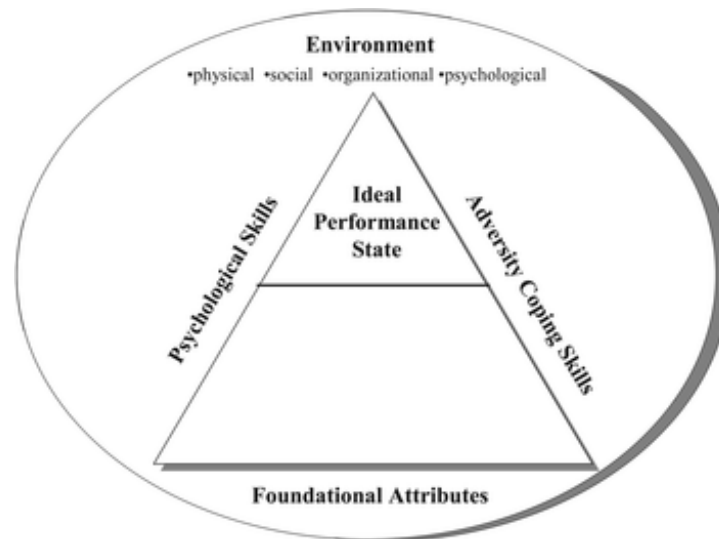


Figure 3.4 The Pyramid Model of Athletic Excellence (Harmison and Casto, 2012, P. 717)

To reach optimal performance, this model offers a framework that consists of five items that will give a better understanding of the psychological factors and what role they play when trying to reach optimal performance. First out is the base of the model, *Foundational Attributes*, which includes the athletes' personality traits, motivational orientations, and philosophical beliefs. Examples of these attributes can be confidence, competitive trait anxiety, task versus ego goal orientations etc. Further, moving upwards in the model, it suggest that the athlete need to develop *Psychological Skills* and *Adversity Coping Skills*. Inheriting these skills will help the athlete to attain and maintain an ideal performance state (Harmison and Casto, 2012; Aoyagi and Poczwadowski, 2016). Psychological skills can be goal-setting, imagery, and pre-performance routines, and by developing these skills, athletes can better prepare themselves for optimal performance. The adversity coping skills can be used to handle injuries, performance demands, and expectations from others, which can inhibit optimal performance. These skills can be emotion-focused coping, realistic stress appraisal, or social support for example (Harmison and Casto, 2012; Aoyagi and Poczwadowski, 2016). This will lead us to the top of the model which is the *Ideal Performance State*. To reach this state the athlete is required to get the right levels of cognitions (self-efficacy), emotions (state anxiety), and physiological parameters (arousal), which are individually optimal (Harmison and Casto, 2012). What also influence the ideal performance state is the environment. The physical environment can have an influence on the athletes' ability to maintain or reach an ideal performance state. Which people that supports the athlete in an environment can also be an influence. If they do not get the support they need from other people, they might not be able to reach the ideal state. This is very

individual as some rely more on social support than others. Evidently in this model, performance enhancement techniques and coping strategies that work on the players wellbeing are connected together. This could be inspiring when developing a programme.

3.3.3 Wheel of Excellence

In this model, Orlick (2008) suggest that certain skills are vital for people to develop and reach their potential. The wheel centres around the most important skill in the model, which is focus.

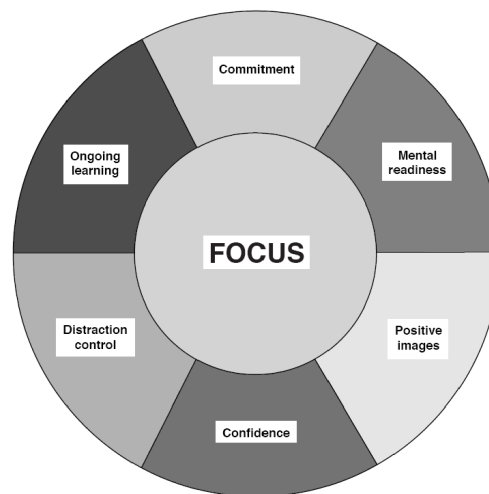


Figure 3.5 The Wheel of Excellence (Orlick, 2008, P. 12)

Orlick (2008) suggest that people that performing their best, or compete at the highest levels, have learned how to focus. Developing good focus will help athletes to get where they want to go by learning more efficiently, experiment methods and strategies, grow, create, and enjoy sessions. Around focus, the other elements of the wheel include commitment, mental readiness, positive images, confidence, distraction control, and ongoing learning. For athletes to be committed to growing, the sport needs to be something that the athletes are passionate about and an activity they find meaningful. By visualizing where they want to go with the sport or activity can help to develop commitment. Commitment will grow if athletes focus on; continuing to learn and grow, pursuing dreams or making meaningful contribution, setting clear personal goals and pursuing them, being persistent, keeping the joy or passion in their pursuit (Orlick, 2008).

Mental readiness considers the athletes' capability to being positive, focused, persistent, and fully committed. To develop mental readiness athletes would need to focus on; preparing, practicing, and training with full focus and the right level of intensity. They need to be able to shift from negative focus to positive focus, create positive learning opportunities and taking advantage of them. Identifying the necessary skills to reach goals, being able to self-evaluate after performances, and being able to relax, rest, and recover is also important (Orlick, 2008). To develop positive images, athletes need to create visions to focus on. These images can be positive images of where they want to go in their life, and reaching success and happiness. The athletes would need to create positive images of the steps they need to take or inspiring images that make them want to continue pursuing their goal.

Confidence is an important element of the wheel in the pursuit of excellence. Olick (2008) suggest that confidence increases or decreases based on the quality of preparation, quality of focus, and the extent to which the belief in your capacity. Positive self-talk and drawing on lessons from previous positive experiences might contribute to higher confidence. Confidence requires a specific focus, and confidence can grow when the focus is on your own potential, your capacity to overcome obstacles and achieving goals (Orlick, 2008). Being able to shut out what you do not want to focus on is also important. Distraction control refers to not letting anything to interfere with your focus and your performance. Distractions can be external, and stem from other people such as fans, media, coaches, and competitors, or it can be internal and be connected with negative self-talk such as doubts, worries, fears, or own expectations.

Orlick (2008) suggest that athletes need to focus on reducing stress, maintaining a positive, effective focus when facing distractions, and being able to refocus. Athletes that continuously perform on a high level are superb self-directed learners (Orlick, 2008). They see the pursuit of excellence as a process of ongoing learning, as they search for strategies that brings them to their best performances. Skills required for ongoing learning will develop when athletes focus on finding joy in what they do well and in the small steps forward, identifying relevant lessons from experiences and performances, and reflecting on activities while acting on what they learned to improve (Orlick, 2008).

Personal Excellence is not something that comes straight away, it is an ongoing, lifelong process. Orlick (2008) suggest that no matter how good you are and how well you are

performing, there are always things you can improve or do better. Being able to self-evaluate and look for areas to improve are important to achieve personal excellence. This model seems to work on a few of the characteristics of “The Geirs 11 Model”, and can inspire academies in NTFs academy classification.

3.3.4 Life Development Intervention (LDI)

Changes in players’ life can influence the players functioning and performance, and it might come down to how they cope with it if the outcome of the change is good or bad. It may be important to have some coping strategies, as critical changes in players’ life can lead to decreased functioning, small changes, or increased growth, which is the favoured outcome of change or critical life events. This is where the Life Development Intervention (LDI) comes in. The LDI is a framework designed to view changes as opportunities, and by using this framework, it may increase the probability for growth rather than a negative result (Danish et al., 1993). Players may need either a social support system, or a qualified person to assist them to cope with life events.

To get a positive result from changes in life, there are certain actions that can increase the likelihood of growth. People assisting the person affected by change need to (1) understand the problem from the persons’ perspective, (2) support the person with resources and help assessing coping strategies, (3) making the most of and apply existing resources, and learn new coping skills, (4) assisting the person practicing the new skills and following them up, and (5) planning for future event (Aoyagi and Poczwardowski, 2016). Using the LDI framework require some vital skills to carry out the three primarily strategies. The main strategies are counselling, goal setting and teaching life skills. This means that people carrying out this framework would need good counselling skills. They need to be good listeners and have good communication skills to fully understand the client as attempting to solve a problem before they got full understanding is not preferable (Danish et al., 1993).

Goal setting is an important strategy as the LDI is designed to improve personal competence. Personal competence can be defined as the ability to do life planning, be self-reliant, and seek resources of others (Danish et al., 1993). Danish and colleagues (1993) suggest that identifying goals, set them, and then achieving them is key to developing personal competence. Being able to do this, players will feel in control over their future, feel

empowerment, and have a greater sense of self-efficacy (Danish et al., 1993). Many of the skills that athletes learn from sports are not just relevant to sports, they can be transferred to other aspects in life. These skills are called life skills. Transferable skills can for example be to perform under pressure, or being able to acknowledge feedback and criticism in order to learn (Danish et al., 1993).

People that carry out the LDI framework need to be able to teach others such life skills and how to apply them. The skill must be explained as how it works, what needs to be done to learn it, and how this skill can increase performance. Then, the skill needs to be demonstrated so the athletes can see what successful execution looks like and what unsuccessful execution looks like. Athletes should later execute the skill with supervision, and then, homework on the skill should be assigned to the athletes. Lastly, the skills should be evaluated and future needs identified (Danish et al., 1993). If athletes inherit the skills, and understand how they can be transferred, they can use the skills to cope with changes in life better and grow.

3.3.5 The 5C's Coaching Efficacy Programme

The 5C's Coaching Efficacy Programme was designed to assist and guide coaches to structure training sessions that would develop players' psychological skills (Harwood, 2008). Coaches that participated in such a programme would develop relevant competence and confidence that they could successfully teach players some of the most important skills considering players' psyche. Skills that were included in the programme were viewed as some of the most important psychological skills, as they are relevant to many different challenges and situations (Harwood, 2008).

The name of the programme describes the five chosen skills as all start with the letter c; Commitment, Communication, Concentration, Control, and Confidence. Coaches that wanted to implement this programme in their sessions, were given workshops on each of the five C's by consultants. The workshops were set up every two weeks and lasted for 90 minutes. After each workshop, the coaches were expected to implement the psychological skill they had just learned about. If implemented in a good manner, players experienced positive psychological momentum (Jones and Harwood, 2008). Jones and Harwood (2008) also noticed that players still could experience negative momentum, but many players did, however, learn strategies to both maintain good momentum, as well as strategies to

overcome negative psychological momentum. Within the 5C's the coaches also learned eight behavioural guidelines; (1) consider the psychological skills on the same line of importance like physical skills, (2) increase knowledge and awareness of the skills, (3) communicate and highlight the value of the skills, (4) role model the skill, (5) set up sessions in a way that makes players learn the skills, (6) publicly reinforce players who use the skills, (7) implement peer reinforcement of each skill, and (8) review the skills during each session (Harwood, 2008). These were developed by the consultants, and was important for successful implementation. For coaches, the programme increased their knowledge of how to teach these skills to their players, and the biggest improvements were commitment and communication. Players however, showed greatest increase in skills like concentration, self-control, and self-confidence. This approach shows how mental training can be included in the football training sessions.

3.4 Performance enhancement techniques vs. counselling

There exist many different techniques that coaches can adapt to work on mental skills among athletes. In this section, cognitive enhancement techniques, known as performance enhancement techniques, and a counselling approach will be provided. This will be done by explaining the most commonly mentioned performance enhancement techniques in literature and mental training approaches, and existential psychology approach to give an understanding of the different focus areas. This may give an understanding of the Aker academy's routines are focusing more on performance enhancement techniques, or if they are focusing more on life skills and wellbeing.

3.4.1 Self-talk

Self-talk is something all of us are doing on a daily basis inside our own heads. It is even reported that 95% of people that engage in physical activities and exercise use self-talk (Hardy and Zourbanos, 2016). Van Ralte and colleagues (2015) defines self-talk as an act of syntactically recognizable communication in which the sender of the message is also the receiver. This definition offers the explanation that when people engage in self-talk, they are giving themselves messages, feedback, and instructions, which in sport, they would also get externally, but when its internally, the athletes may be able to control what messages they get. In their systematic review, Tod and colleagues (2011) examined in which way self-talk

improved performance and which mediators self-talk affected. Four different, broad mediators were examined; cognitive, behavioural, motivational and affectual. Performance can benefit from the use of self-talk categories such as positive, instructional, and motivational self-talk. Factors as behavioural and cognitive benefited from positive self-talk as it enhanced confidence in the athletes and improved their technique. Motivation also benefited, but it was mostly due to instructional or motivational self-talk (Tod et al., 2011). A surprising argument from Hardy and Zourbanos (2016) is that there is little empirical evidence of the effects of positive thinking and positive self-talk contra negative self-talk has on performance. They did however, discuss a study that showed that positive statements, such as “I can...” lead to higher accuracy for dart players than a control group that used negative statements as “I cannot...”. After going through empirical research, Hardy and Zourbanos (2016) suggests advice to practitioners of self-talk in terms of 5P’s. The first P stands for Personalized, as self-talk is more effective and meaningful if its individually shaped by the user. The second P is for Practiced as it will be more effective the more it is practiced. To have clear Purpose of the self-talk is the third P. Even though there are little evidence to support Positive phrasing of the self-talk, it still is the fourth P. The users Position is the last P, as it will further inform the practitioner, enhancing the efficacy of the intervention (Zourbanos, 2016).

3.4.2 Goal-setting

Goal-setting can be used in many different situations and is a technique that is proven to get results. For injured athletes, goal setting can be motivating in terms of setting goals to come back to fitness again. They can use goal setting to see where they are going, and observe the progress they are doing on their way (Pedlog, 2016). According to Roy and Kuan (2016), setting goals can increase self-efficacy and result in more positive moods, if the goals that are set are realistic. Progressing and attaining goals will also develop personal competence among athletes (Aoyagi and Poczwadowski, 2012). Setting goals directs attention towards the important aspects of performance, mobilizing effort and persistence over time, while ongoing evaluation and progress (Hampson and Harwood, 2016).

Goal setting increases motivation and performance. However, goals need to be attainable and not too out of reach to be effective, otherwise, it might lead to lower performance and effort. If athletes fail too often for too long, the goal setting technique will work against the

wanted outcomes (Locke and Latham, 1985; Weinberg et al., 1993). Long-term goals seem to be the most effective, while some suggest that it is effective to combine these long-term goals with short term goals. Others argue that short term goals do not show significance improvement in performance. These various results could of course come from individual differences, as some might be more motivated of short-term goals than others (Locke and Latham, 1985; Weinberg et al., 1993).

According to Ntoumanis and Cumming (2016), the perception of success in sport is often viewed as overcoming adversity and to triumph, and sports often glorify the concepts of “always trying” and never “give up”. However, it is important to know when to disengage from a goal when, or if it becomes unattainable. This may concern athletes that face uncertain challenges such as injury or health issues, or athletes that has set goals that are too difficult to reach at the current moment. Athletes that face such challenges does not necessarily need to fully disengage from a goal. They can for example reengage their goal and find different strategies to reaching the given goal (Ntoumanis and Cumming, 2016).

How the goal is set might also affect if the goal is reached. If the goal is autonomous for the athletes, they may show more effort to attain the goal, and other beneficial factors such as psychological wellbeing (Smith et al., 2011). Smith and colleagues (2011) also noticed that when goals have controlled motives, they are unrelated to effort and goal attainment. These type of goals are also negatively related to athletes’ wellbeing, and will not likely be successful in the long run (Smith et al., 2011).

3.4.3 Imagery

Imagery might be the most known mental skill there is. This is because (almost) all of us use our imagination daily, and the fact that coaches and athletes often speak of imagery as an important part of their mental preparations and practice. Mental imagery can often be limited to the term visualization, which means to just “see” things in their minds. Imagery involves much more than that, its multisensory. When engaging in mental imagery, athletes does not only see an event, they actually feel it, hear it, tastes it, and smell it, if it is done right (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016).

There exist various models for making imagery as effective as possible, and maybe the most well-known is the PETTLEP model. The PETTLEP model is created based on research and argue that mental imagery training can be very effective and can provide similar learning as physical training (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016). They suggest that if one make a mental image as specific and detailed as possible, the person would have the same psychological responses that he/she would have if they actually were doing the activity, meaning they can actually train on activities from everywhere. It does however, demand a lot of practice, but the skill will improve, if practiced well enough. The athlete that use the PETTLEP model for imagery should (1) imagine their Physical state in the image, (2) they should be detailed about the Environment in which the activity is imagined, (3) the Task they are performing in the image should be clearly defined, (4) Timing in the image should be as realistic as possible, (5) what they are Learning from the image should be well-known and focused on, (6) the experienced Emotions needs to be as real and realistically felt as possible, (7) and lastly, their Perspective in the image needs to be right for the given image to be as effective as possible (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016).

For imagery to be effective, it needs to be implemented into athletes daily practice, and can start with as little as five-minute sessions one or two times a day. This should eventually be increased as the athletes become better, as this mental skill, as for physical skills, become better with practice (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016).

3.4.4 Self-regulation

Being able to self-regulate training is an important skill to inherit to become a professional football player (Olafsen, 2019). Self-regulation can be defined as the ability to control their feelings, thoughts, and actions. Self-regulation of learning refers to self-initiated processes that make it possible for individuals to transform their mental abilities into performance skills (Toering et al., 2012). An athlete that has good self-regulation skills are proactive in maximizing opportunities that they recognize as important for their development (Ntoumanis and Cumming, 2016). The athlete that self-regulate their learning well (1) plan how they want to improve before initiating actions, (2) self-monitor their actions relative to their goal, (3) evaluate the process employed and the outcome achieved after task execution, and (4) reflect upon the entire process during cycles of planning, self-monitoring, and evaluation (Toering et al., 2012). This skill can be demanding for players as it is an effortful

and deliberate process, and it include decision-making skills, planning skills to reach a certain standard, as well as regulating the execution of these actions, (Ntoumanis and Cumming, 2016). For an athlete to be able to self-regulate, research suggests that athletes that regulates based on autonomy, and has a coach that supports this autonomy, will self-regulate better as they would have an intrinsic motivation to do what they do rather than being controlled (Côté and Erickson, 2016).

In 1986, Zimmerman suggested a three-phased model for self-regulated learning and the phases in the model are interdependent (Zimmerman, 2008). In the forethought phase, he argues that there are two major processes: task analysis and self-motivation (Zimmerman, 2002). Goal-setting and strategic planning are common strategies for task analysis (Zimmerman, 2002). In the performance phase, athletes would need to address two certain skills: self-control and self-observation. Self-control in this model refers to applying different strategies that should have been selected during the forethought phase. Well-known and key types of self-control strategies that can be put to use are self-instruction (self-talk), attention focusing, imagery, and task strategies. To self-observe, athletes can apply methods such as self-record or self-experimentation (Zimmerman, 2002). In the self-reflection phase, athletes would need to address both self-judgement and self-reaction. Self-evaluation is a method of self-judgement and it refers to evaluate oneself based on comparisons with a certain standard, such as a prior performance, others performance, or an absolute standard (Zimmerman, 2002). Athletes could also use causal attribution as a strategy for self-judgement. This strategy refers to the beliefs about one's error or successes. Self-reaction can include feelings of self-satisfaction and positive affect regarding their performance (Zimmerman, 2002).

Toering and colleagues (2012) study on self-regulation amongst youth elite and non-elite looked deeper into differences between the two groups when it comes to self-regulation. In terms of Zimmerman's model, they noticed that there were no significant differences in the two first phases, forethought and performance phase. They did however notice difference in the last phase, self-evaluation. What differentiated the two groups were the international players' ability of reflection. The skill of reflecting is associated with performance level and unrelated to relative age. They speculate that reflection may help players cope with unstable periods in their development and that this could be one of the reasons why international level players perform better than national level players (Toering et al., 2012). Having a system

that encourages players to follow Zimmerman's model could be beneficial, especially for the skill of reflection.

3.4.5 Existential psychology

According to Nesti (2004), the cognitive-behavioural approach has been dominant for a long time in applied sport psychology. Nesti (2004) expressed his concern with sport psychologists relying on mental skill training, and the techniques that comes with it, often are merely sticking plasters, and there are often much more needed. He suggests that there is a need to consider deeper issues and moving away from just managing symptoms. Existential psychologist see people as split down the middle, meaning they are aware of the fact they can be free and they are responsible for their actions, but at the same time they are incapable of fully understand how much of their works and thoughts are influenced by constrains beyond themselves (Nesti, 2004). Counselling in sport is a field that gets larger focus, and there is a growing interest in approaches of how broader life issues can be accommodated (Nesti, 2004). These life issues can be relationship problems, financial challenges, media difficulties, or career transitions and there is unlikely that programs of mental skills training can help solving these, according to Nesti (2004). Nesti (2004) suggests that such life issues, and many other, can have an influence on an athlete's performance and wellbeing.

Existential psychologists in sport are reluctant to use techniques such as questionnaires, imagery, mirroring, relaxation training and more, at any stage of their applied work, because these may increase the distance between client and psychologist. They fear that bringing these techniques into an existential meeting will objectify the problem. This can lead to the psychologist viewing the client as a case or a problem to be solved, or even a source of income and professional prestige (Nesti, 2004). These techniques also seem to be popular as they give results in the short term (Nesti, 2010).

The goal for psychologists using an existential approach is to help people face up to big questions in life, and the key questions are focused on the search for meaning in the individuals' life, and the fact of our mortality. *"Existential philosophy is primarily interested in efforts directed at understanding what it means to be a human being"* (Nesti, 2004. P.25). The main task for us human beings according to existential philosophy and psychology is to

live an authentic life. If there is a lack of authenticity and courage, it can result in a loss of the most important part of ourselves; *the self*. Without the *self*, which is the psychological core, we will not be able to grow as persons.

The existential approach distinguishes between two sorts of anxiety. *Normal anxiety* is a healthy sort of anxiety and are related to people's desire to grow, develop or expand their self-awareness (Nesti, 2004). Learning and personal growth cannot happen without moving away from what is safe and known to some degree, and this is what brings the anxiety. This anxiety is normal, but it can turn to be a problem if a person repeatedly tries to avoid it. If a person is refusing to accept their personal responsibility for growth and distance themselves from the choices they really need to face can lead to *neurotic anxiety* which is a result of repeated failure to face up to the discomfort of normal anxiety (Nesti, 2004). This is why the existential approach do not want to eliminate or remove anxiety and situations that make athletes anxious. Dealing with, and accepting anxiety will be healthy for the athletes as normal stress is associated with personal growth. Sport psychologists may however help the athletes to handle the anxiety to not make the anxiety neurotic. The existential approach also suggests that individuals who engage in anxious situations will be better prepared to face the experience of anxiety again. They will teach themselves courage and faith in anxious situations.

Anxiety can be viewed as something good amongst athletes from an existential approach. Rather than learning players' techniques to remove this anxiety, the existential approach suggest that athletes should accept the anxiety and facing it in order to grow (Nesti, 2004). This can lead the person to develop courage, faith and confidence, and they will be prepared to face their freedom and life. Athletes may however need help to face these anxieties, and it might be necessary for them to have someone to talk to, which can help them accepting challenges, responsibility, and making choices to face their anxieties and insecurities. The role of the person helping the athlete is not to provide a solution or to suggest the best choice. They should concentrate on helping athletes recognize their resistance to, and attempts to control changes in their lives, rather than guide them towards a way of change directly (Nesti, 2004).

3.5 Leadership

The need to feel competent seems like a very important factor for employees to perform at their best. However, it can be a challenge to feel competent in all work tasks, and it is the leaders and the management's responsibility to facilitate a work environment that balances out the employees' competence. Meaning, it is the leaders' task to utilize the employees' strengths and help or guide them at areas they are weak at (Buble et al., 2014; Hanafi et al., 2019). This can be done in different ways, and the leadership style in the organization can give an understanding of how leaders make the best out of their employees. More importantly for the current study, would be how leaders select motivational approaches based on their leadership style, and how leaders, through these styles consider the employees' competence.

As mentioned, the Aker academy has been under multiple managerial changes during the last few years (moldefk.no, 2018; moldefk.no, 2020). In the past three, there has been three different academy leaders. Given the frequent changes of leaders one may indicate that the academy has been under both functional and philosophical changes as well as the leaders may want to implement their own ideas in the club (moldefk.no, 2019; Kelly, 2017). According to related management and stress management literature, leaders also tends to seek the right balance between change and stability within their organization (Mintzberg, 1973; Sayles, 1964). Two suggested approaches are that the leader can do a few changes in some aspects while keeping the rest constant and familiar. Or, they may switch between periods with comprehensive change followed by periods with stability as an ongoing process (Sayles, 1964). Those approaches shares similarities with transformational and functional leadership respectively. A transformational leadership approach relies more on the individual leader and his or her ideas (McMahon, 2007). The leader will have responsibility to drive the organization forward, and depending on the leader's success, the organization either sticks with the leader, or start on scratch with a new leader. In football, we recognize such patterns of change when clubs appoint new managers as soon as the previous fails (or leaves). Leaders that adopt a transformational leadership style tend to do significant changes in the organization, such as ambitions to change culture, values, beliefs and methods, with the aim to reach the new target (Bass and Bass, 2008). In contrast, the functional approach allows more stability. The leader is considered as a part of the workforce and a person to guide the organization forward, rather than responsible to define the direction for the

organization on their own (McMahon, 2007). Going with a functional approach makes the organization less vulnerable to swift changes in personnel and managerial approaches, as these organizations do not rely too heavily on the leaders. As such, functional leadership is anchored in organizational values which increase the likeliness for continuity in work. While a transformational approach will be more prone to fluctuations depending of personal values and beliefs (McMahon, 2007; Bass and Bass, 2008).

3.5.1 Leadership styles

Leadership styles relate to how leaders influence and directs employees to perform, including their use of methods, behaviours and communication (Bass and Bass, 2008). The variance of how these are used, often makes it difficult to place leaders into certain leadership styles. To make it even more complex, different situations need different handling by using different methods that can be associated with various leadership styles.

3.5.1.1 Transformational leadership style

A transformational leadership style can be described as a style that focuses on transforming values and beliefs of followers by inspiring them (Bass and Bass, 2008). Transformational leaders will provide new understandings of issues in an organization. They will come in with new ideas, foster inspiration and anticipation to add additional labour to achieve overall goals. These leaders will affect employees' attitudes, motivation and beliefs as they strive to improve themselves and the organization. This sort of leadership is quite different from transactional, as this style try to develop the employees to reach their full potential by influencing and engaging them. Doing so can make the employees more committed by satisfaction and motivation as they find the organization beneficial for their personal development (Bass and Bass, 2008; Zareen et al., 2014).

3.5.1.2 Transactional leadership style

Leaders that closely monitor their employees and motivates them with rewards on their performance is known as a transactional leadership style (Bass and Bass, 2008). In the transactional leadership style, the employee gets guidance and feedback in terms of positive rewards and praise, or negative disciplinary actions for their efforts. Leaders with such a

style show characteristics as active management by exception and passive management by exception, as well as giving contingent rewards. They also seem to communicate what their employees should do and how they should do it, and then monitor their actions closely. Based on how the employees perform from the given instructions the leader gives either rewards or punishment (Bass and Bass, 2008; Zareen et al., 2014).

3.5.1.3 Laissez-faire leadership style

Another dimension of leadership is the laissez-faire style. This is where leaders delegate all power and decision-making to their employees (Bass and Bass, 2008). When leaders have this style, they can also provide guidance and related support in a way that involve the employees in the tasks, which can be motivating for organizational performance (Zareen et al., 2014). These leaders give the employees a lot of freedom to make their own decisions, and provides them with necessary tools and resources (Bass and Bass, 2008). This style can be very effective if the employees are highly skilled, motivated, capable, and willing to engage in activities on their own. However, when employees lack the necessary knowledge, experience and expertise in the tasks given to them, it becomes inappropriate and would most likely be unsuccessful. This also goes for people that are unwilling or unable to make decisions on their own (Zareen et al., 2014; Buch et al., 2015). This suggest that if the laissez-faire style is used in the right circumstances with employees with the right skills, knowledge, expertise and willingness to take on the responsibility of decision-making, can be an effective and efficient leadership style, and it will raise the motivation of the employees (Bass and Bass, 2008; Yang, 2015). However, if the mentioned factor is not evident, the laissez-faire style will bring uncertainty, inefficiency, and frustration in the organization. This will decrease the motivation amongst the employees (Zareen et al., 2014).

3.5.2 Organizational structure and descriptions

Buble and colleagues (2014), discuss how three motivational factors can affect motivation that leaders need to consider. They need to consider the individual characteristics such as the employee's needs, attitudes and interest. The organizational characteristics, such as immediate work settings and organizational practices, needs to be taken into consideration as they can affect employees' motivation. Also, job characteristics, such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback is important motivational factors. The

interaction between these three factors is something that the leader needs to consider when understanding employee motivation. Understanding that people are motivated in different ways are vital, and the way they apply certain rewards and rules can both motivate and demotivate the employees (Buble et al., 2014). Motivated employees are important for organizations as they tend to be more committed to the tasks and assignments that they are given. They work hard to achieve the organizational goals, and they view themselves as important to the organization. In their eyes, the organization is a place where they can develop themselves and improve, which makes them loyal to the organization. Their motivation however, is based on their leaders' values, behaviours and the way the leaders lead them (Zareen et al., 2014).

Hanafi and colleagues (2019) suggest that organizational structure and job analysis are descriptions that leaders can implement that affect motivation. Organizational structure can be described as a formal job arrangement within an organization. In an organization with such structure, the work task should be divided formally and coordinated. Characteristics of organizational structure can be a specialization of work, departmentalization, a chain of a span command, control, centralization, decentralization, and formalization (Hanafi et al., 2019). However, in some cases the perception of external constrictions such as deadlines or guidelines can have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation. This is because it can have an effect the employees' autonomy, freedom and decreased control on their day-to-day which leads to lower levels of self-determination (Sherman and Smith, 1984).

Job analysis can be used to construct a job description. This description can be a form with detailed information of the tasks the employee needs to perform in their agreed position. Also, it can include the determination of the relationship of a position to another position, and which knowledge, skills and other capabilities that are required for the position to perform both effectively and efficiently (Hanafi et al., 2019). Hanafi and colleagues (2019) suggest that leadership styles, organizational structure, and job analysis are connected, and together, they have a big impact on employee motivation. They argued that the better the organizational structure is, the better the job analysis is, and the better style of leadership, the higher motivation employees will have (Hanafi et al., 2019).

3.5.3 External factors

The internal factors are seldom the only factors that affects how the academy needs to lead and change. In Norway, the NTF's Academy classification system has a major influence on participating clubs as the financial arrangement involves a checklist and a points system defined by the NTF. Academies management may have to do changes in operations to fulfil or adapt to the classification.

Football mentality is one such factor on the checklist that the academies have to address, and "The Geirs 11 Model" is the model that NTF refers to when it comes to mental training. The challenge with externally developed models however, is to make it fit to the local contexts that is likely to involve some degree of deviant competences, experiences, beliefs and communities to the model requirements. Practically speaking, one might assume that both competence and personnel limitations are relevant in a sector characterized by time squeeze and traditions for physical-tactical training (Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). This will of course also affect the leader who is responsible for bringing the model to life and making it reach its purpose. If the leader feels that he or she lack the required knowledge about both the model and mental training, it will prevent him/her from making authentic decisions (Fusco, 2015), and affects the leaders' communication about it, and the decisions connected to it (Herskedal, 2017).

While clubs take part in NTF's classification system from free will, the suggested model may feel "forced" on to the academies as the clubs are evaluated on what NTF defines as football mentality. The coaches may not agree that this is the best way of working on players' mentality, and they may not find it very motivating to use this model. It is suggested by researchers that to create ownership in the workplace, and especially ownership towards plans and strategy, it is important to involve the employees in the construction of such plans and strategies (Kotter, 1996; Steiner, 1979). When creating strategies in workplaces, it should not be underestimated the influence employee inclusion can have on organizational efficiency (Steiner, 1979). This is also emphasized in Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), that through involved employees will feel a stronger sense on ownership in work and more willingly to "walk the extra mile" to reach the targets.

4.0 Methodology

In this chapter, an explanation for the choice of method and design based on theoretical considerations will be provided. Following, an explanation for the choice of participants, and the data collection strategy will be argued for. Further, it will be presented a description of the data analysis process and guidelines. Lastly, the ethical considerations are reasoned for.

4.1 Qualitative approach

To select the right research approach, it is important to address the research problem and how to best investigate the issue (Creswell, 2014). The explorative nature of the current study, and the limited number of participants (n=4), did argue for using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research approaches are used to explore and understand individuals or groups meanings towards a social or a human problem. Data from using a qualitative approach are typically based on individuals' thoughts, meanings, and experiences (Jacobsen, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Gathering information through using a qualitative approach allows the researcher to develop a relation to few participants that provide substantial data, which is helpful when exploring human behaviours and reflections (Jacobsen, 2015). In this case, the coaches' attitudes towards mental training and their associated thoughts.

4.2 Participants

The selection process was based on the participants' role-related knowledge and experiences regarding the research question. According to Given (2008), participants should be selected from their ability to generate insight and provide credible answers. The selected participants should be sources with rich and complex information that are relevant to the study (Given, 2008).

4.2.1 Selection of participants

After being a part of the Aker academy for three months during an internship, four of the coaches in the academy were asked to participate in the study by SMS or by e-mail, and all four agreed to participate. The Aker academy consists of four different teams; the MFK women team, U 19's (MFK 2), U 16's, and U 14's. All these teams have a coaching team of two or three football coaches, as well as one physical coach that works with all teams. The coaches in all teams work together at many tasks considering their squad, but each team has one head coach. They are the ones that are responsible for their squad, and are in control of what happens on and off the field for their players' development and training methods, including mental training. Taking these facts into consideration, and following Given's (2008) instructions of including people that offers ability to generate insight and provide credible answers, the head coaches seemed to be the most interesting participants to include in the study and gather data from. They are the ones working with the mental tools and programme. The other coaches could also have been interesting sources of information, but as the overall aim of this study demands investigation on a deep level to understand their attitudes and why they possessed such attitudes, there needed to be limited down to these four head coaches as participants. By doing that, I would have the right informants as they are the one responsible for mental training, and I would not get too much detailed information for analysis (Jacobsen, 2015). The selected participants would help me as a researcher to understand the problem and research question (Creswell, 2014).

Selecting coaches from the different teams was also a consideration. Having coaches that did not work on the same team would give different perspectives as they might not share as much information as coaches working on the same team. With different experience and background, the coaches could provide interesting views on the topic, but working in the same organization for a varying number of years, as well as working together closely could affect their opinions. They could have been influenced by each other, and the guidelines of the organization, but it was interesting to see their individual experiences, views and attitudes towards mental training during the interviews. All participants were informed about the intended degree of confidentiality in the study which they all agreed to. The agreement involved avoidance of using the participants' names and easily identifying background information (Appendix 10.2 consent form).

4.3 Data collection

To get an understanding of the coaches' attitudes towards their mental training programme and mental training in general, a semi-structured interview approach was selected as the most suitable data collection strategy. Using face-to-face interviews as a data collection strategy is the most common interview form, and is a powerful technique that is used to understand human beings (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews contain both structured and unstructured sections with mostly open-ended questions (Walliman, 2010; Creswell, 2014). Having too structured interviews are often criticized as they would not catch up topics or discussions that looser interviews will. If the interview is strictly structured, follow-up questions and change of directions in the interview is not possible, and potential critical or important points may be left out (Brinkman, 2013). That is why it was important to prepare topics to talk about, and have questions as a guidance during the interview while still being open to change direction or asking follow-up questions. The interviewers' role is to listen, and withhold desires to interrupt, and stay neutral while maintain the interview on relevant topics (Brinkman, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

The interviews were conducted individually to keep the interview less lively and more confidential (Brinkman, 2014). Having the interviews face-to-face was also important, as I was able to pick up on body languages and facial expressions, which can provide information (Brinkman, 2014). Such face-to-face interviews can be conducted from anywhere, but to make it more comfortable for the participants, the interviews were conducted at their offices as a familiar environment in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014; Walliman, 2010; Brinkman, 2013, 2014; Jacobsen, 2015). Fortunately, this was possible even though the coronavirus restrictions from the government, as the interviews were scheduled at a time where the restrictions were loosened.

The interviews were sound recorded to get accurate statements from the coaches (Walliman, 2010; Yin, 2018). Within a couple of days, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. This was done as close to the interviews as possible to link more accurately the memory of body

language with the various statements (Brinkman, 2014). Although transcribing was time consuming, it offered the me as a researcher a deeper familiarity with the content.

4.3.2 Interview guide and interview procedure

To make sure that the interview kept on track, related to the research aims, an interview guide was developed beforehand. Interview guides can be read as summaries of the content that the researcher wants to cover during interviews (Given, 2008; Sounders, 2009). The interview guide consisted of themes and topics that enabled the researcher to obtain participants meanings and understandings without losing direction and purpose (Sounders, 2009). To balance between having a semi-structured interview and keeping the interview on track, the most suitable way to set up the interview guide was to formulate main questions/topics with additional questions and probes that was used to follow up initial responses and gather greater detail from the participants (Sounders, 2009; Given, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Although the interview guide was also structured in a logical way (Sounders, 2009), both the researcher and the participant was free to step out of the original structure to follow interesting themes or to keep the conversations fluid (Given, 2008).

To design the interview guide, Creswell's (2014, P. 244) guidelines were followed, starting with ice-breaking questions to make the participants loosen up and comfortable. The first part of the interview guide concerned introductory comments and demographic information. For a safe "take off", questions related to the coaches' background, such as age, education, work experience and length of employment in the club, was accounted for. Such questions may also be important to capture important moments in their careers that can influence their attitudes.

From there, the main questions/topics followed. In the first part of the main topics we discussed, questions about their personal opinions and attitudes towards mental training and sport psychology were covered. This would give the coaches the opportunity to express their level of interest and views of importance considering the subject. Discussions about their experience with mental training was also discussed in this section, and would be an interesting factor to get an understanding for their opinions and attitudes in the two next parts of the interview. These considered the coaches' attitudes towards the existing methods and routines in the academy concerning mental training. In the last part of the interview, the

coaches' attitudes and beliefs towards the future solutions on working with mental training was discussed.

Probes and follow-up questions was included in all topics to get a good understanding from the participants' point of view. During the interviews, it was also important that both the interviewee and interviewer had the opportunity to add comments, questions or clarifications. In the end, the interviewee was asked if they had anything to add in case the interview guide did not cover everything they wanted to talk about.

4.4 Analysis

“A methods discussion in a qualitative proposal needs also to specify the steps in analyzing the various forms of qualitative data. In general, the intent is to make sense out of text and image data. It involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like Peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together”. Creswell, 2014, p. 245.

There exist different approaches to analyse qualitative interviews, and it depends on your research question and theoretical framework which approach that is right (Sounders, 2009; Brinkman, 2013). In general, when analysing qualitative data, the purpose is to make sense out of the text or image data (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the objective of the analysis is to create and organise a system of categories and themes from the raw data material provided during the interviews on coaches' opinions and attitudes on mental training.

To develop such an organised system, the first step in the analysing phase was to listen to all interviews repeatedly and transcribe them into a Word document. First of all, this is done to be able to analyse the material as accurately as possible, and to avoid assumptions and misconceptions (Given, 2008). Also, by going through recordings multiple times provided more familiarity of the data (Given, 2008; Brinkman, 2013). To identify these categories and themes, a thematic content analysis approach was applied. This approach is useful when studying people's views, opinions, values, experiences or knowledge from qualitative interviews.

From the transcribed interviews, this approach helped identifying common themes from large datasets like such interview transcriptions (Biddle et al., 2001; Prior, 2014). Following Scanlan, Tavissa and Stein's (1989) model, (see figure 4.1) starting out with *flow data*, meaning quotes of similar content, the analysis started out deductively and proceeded inductively as the flow data (quotes) were categorised into units (Biddle et al., 2001).

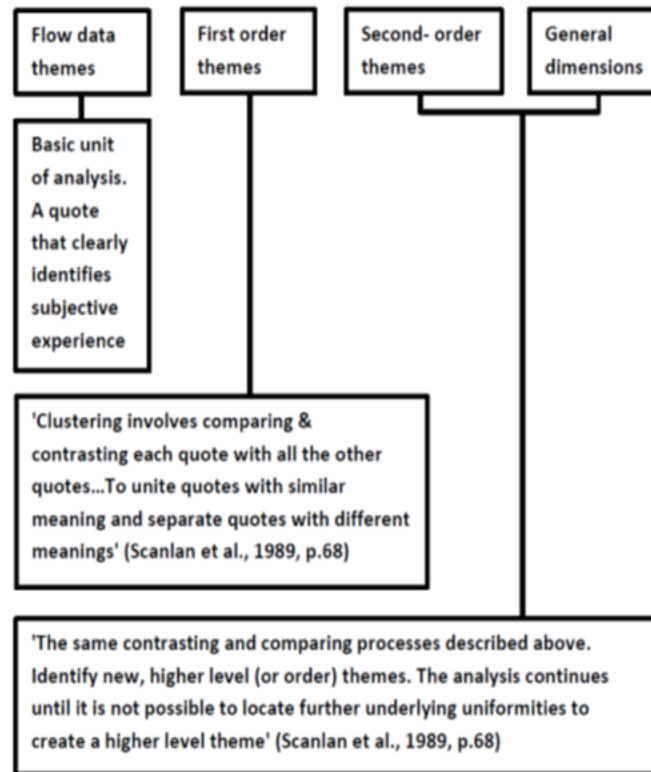


Figure 4.1 Process of content analysis (Biddle et al., 2001, p. 797).

Further, the identified units were compared. During this process, the units were clustered to organise them into specific categories (Biddle et al., 2001). After categorised from similar content, the categories were named based on common characteristics that were shared. These names are what describes the first order themes, and forming of these different first order themes was supported by coding statements and quotes that coaches provided during the interviews. When coaches talked about their perception concerning different topics, situations or experiences, their quotes could together form a first order theme (Sounders, 2009; Saldaña, 2014). For example, some of the coaches talked about how mental training is not a top priority, and together these to quotes is part of a first order theme “mental training is not prioritised”:

“So what happens in the players’ minds is extremely important and its often prioritized last. Meanwhile the technical part is commonly being prioritized, in some contexts.” C4.

“It may be the mental part that get the least focus, even though it might actually make a difference.” C2.

A similar clustering process is used later on to identify second-order themes. First order themes that considers the same matter can be categorised as a second-order theme. This process should be continued until it is no longer possible to create a higher level theme. In this case, there were no higher order themes than second-order themes. However, second-order themes that likewise as the described process considered the same matter could be categorised as the same *general dimension*, or finding.

The general dimensions can be constructed from one or multiple second-order themes (Creswell, 2014; Sounders, 2009; Given, 2008). Following these processes, categories on the coaches’ attitudes towards mental training and their current routines, as well as categories of their feelings and motivation to engage in mental training arrived. This made it easier to notice similarities and differences that was interesting as discussion areas for the research question.

4.5 Ethical considerations

According to Given, (2008) the most important consideration in gaining access to participants of a study using qualitative methods is to do no harm. Taking all research ethics into consideration with formal clearance from a research ethics board is important to complete a study (Booth et al., 2016; Given, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Sounders, 2009). As the research question considers the coaches’ attitudes and opinions towards their workplace, confidentiality was important. The coaches were informed before the interviews that they would be anonymous in the thesis, and there were only me and my supervisor that would have full access to the data.

By offering anonymity, the coaches might have felt more comfortable to share more of their opinions, and express more of their attitudes towards the current routines that exists in the academy concerning mental training (Given, 2008). It can also build trust between the

interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell, 2014). The anonymity can protect the participants from being recognized through their quotes, but the participants were informed that there is a chance that people that know them might recognize them. To further protect the participants' anonymity, they were given different codenames in every section of the interview guide. The codenames; C1, C2, C3, and C4 was randomly given to the coaches in each of the topics that were discussed during the interviews. Meaning, in each of the tables with its findings, the coaches was given a different codename.

An ethical consideration considering the findings, is that it was important to show all findings (Given, 2008). This means that whether the finding is “positive” or “negative” for the research question, the finding should be put forward. If the findings support positive or negative views on mental training should not matter, as the findings should be presented as accurately as possible (Given, 2008; Creswell, 2014).

Another ethical consideration was the agreement to delete all recordings when these were transcribed to protect the anonymity of the participants. This was done after the recordings was transcribed, and there was no more need to listen to them. After the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to the coaches by e-mail to give them the opportunity to change or delete parts of the interviews if they wanted to for any reason.

5.0 Findings

After thoroughly analysing the raw data from the interviews, several general dimensions emerged as interesting findings. These are organised into three categories and presented in this chapter. The first category consists of three tables concerning the coaches' views toward the *mental training competence among the academy coaches*, and the coaches' *views on the importance and complexity of mental training*. The second category consists of four tables, which considers the coaches' *views on current methods and routines concerning mental training in the academy*, and their *views on communication about mental training in the academy*. The last category consists of three tables, which explains the coaches' *views on future needs concerning a mental training programme*.

5.1 Category one: Competence, importance and complexity of mental training

The three tables, containing a total of three general dimensions, represents the first category that considers the coaches background and experiences with mental training, their competence and interest in mental training, and the complexity of mental training as they view it.

5.1.1 Mental training competence among the academy coaches

In Table 1, one general dimension emerged considering the coaches' attitudes towards the *limited focus on the competence about and usage of mental training*. The general dimension is based out from one first order theme and two second-order themes, that argue that (1) mental training is not prioritised, (2) there is varying knowledge on mental training, and (3) there is few opportunities to develop competence about mental training. The setup of themes and the general dimensions is displayed in the table below.

Table 1: Mental training competence among the academy coaches

Coach	Raw data	First order theme	Second order theme	General dimension
C2	<i>I feel we have these, call it the four elements of physics, tactical, technical, mental, and I feel that that we have come further in the physical, technical, tactical than we have in the mental, it sorts of struggles to hang on.</i>	Mental training is not prioritised		
C4	<i>So what happens in the players' minds is extremely important and its often prioritized last. Meanwhile the technical part is commonly being prioritized, in some contexts.</i>			
C2	<i>It may be the mental part that get the least focus, even though it might actually make a difference.</i>			
C1	<i>First, I would like to say that I am neither a mental trainer or in any way educated in psychology, so this is just based on experience</i>	Varying experience and background within mental training	Varying knowledge in mental training	
C2	<i>It really is self-thought. I'm not an expert in this area, but I have had a lot... self-thought and had it in my education.</i>			
C4	<i>Very little. We had some about it in school [psychology], but it's very little from there that I have brought into practice. I have been on courses abroad where it has been discussed but not categorized as mental training, but the thought-processes of the players, how they think. Mental training in football, or the factors within that area are things that I have found on the internet, where I have read and though critically and seen if there is something I can use in my context.</i>			
C3	<i>I'm one of X coaches in the club that has had that "football coach as mental trainer" [course] part one and two. I also had some in college.</i>	Little formal competence in the academy		Limited focus on the competence about- and usage of mental training
C4	<i>There is no one that has education within psychology or in how to understand the players thought processes, except their subjective experiences. So, I wouldn't say we [the academy] has much competence in this area, at least not formally.</i>			
C3	<i>There is almost no formal competence [on psychology/mental training].</i>			
C3	<i>On UEFA B licence, I don't have the impression that there is... it's very influenced by NFF, so it's like that the Norwegian striker should have a "raw mentality", I don't know what that means though. It's things like that. The [UEFA] B player developer is a special course, there were more focus follow-up on players at least. Without the course-holders being aware of it, it does focus on psychological security and things like that. But it's not any conscious focus on it [mental training].</i>	Little focus on mental training in football education		
C2	<i>I wouldn't say it's a big part of the football education really [mental training]. Almost none I would say.</i>			
C4	<i>I don't think it's being focused on in such a big extent on the trainer courses I have been at in Norway. That my opinion.</i>			
C2	<i>It's not many courses about it [mental training]. We have had some... we've been at different gatherings with Norsk Toppfotball [NTF], and had, not courses, but had some input, much where Geir Jordet has been, and it has been exiting to listen to and it makes you think that this is important, but I haven't been on any formal courses</i>	Lack of courses related to mental training	Few opportunities to develop mental training competence	
C4	<i>It's little... it's not that many courses about it [mental training] so it may be difficult to give us competence about it when it's no courses we can go attend.</i>			
C2	<i>I think it's very good that we have sent some guys on course. As we don't have a main mental trainer or supervisor, maybe all of us coaches should at some point take the course that Geir Jordet is running.</i>			
C2	<i>No, it is that we [the academy] were required to send X amount of people and that's it [on mental training course]. So should maybe... it's not the academy leaders' responsibility either to say that we must use more time on it, it may be our common responsibility.</i>	Few initiatives from the management considering courses on mental training		
C3	<i>Sent us on NTF course [mental training course], that's what the academy has done. And they have approved that I have gone to Liverpool on John Moore's on a seminar. But I do it on my own initiative and often get approval.</i>			
C4	<i>Yes, they have sent us on a course by NTF, but that only considered some of our coaches. I think we got a quota, that we just could send X amount of people. But we haven't got any other offers than that course.</i>			

As we can read from the table, two coaches argued that out of all responsibilities and areas that coaches need to cover, mental training is very seldom prioritised. Further, the coaches stated various experiences with mental training, and two coaches argued that there was little or no formal competence on the subject in the academy. Additionally, the coaches argued that there was little focus on mental training in their football education, and a lack of courses available that provided competence on mental training. Lastly, they signalled a situation of limited initiatives from the management to help the coaches develop competence in mental training.

5.1.2 Views on the importance and complexity of mental training

Views on the importance and complexity of mental training is distributed as two tables due to its size, although the heading is the same. Two general dimensions emerged; (1) *mental training is interesting and important in a development context*, and (2) *use and scope of mental training*. The first general dimension (Table 2) consists of two second order themes, where the coaches expresses that mental training can be valuable, and that mental training is important for players to develop as a player and as a person. The second general dimension (Table 3) concerns the use and scope of mental training. It consists of the three second order themes; (1) challenges players need to handle, (2) coaches' perception of mental training being a broad topic, and (3) the mental skills players need to possess.

Table 2: Views on the importance and complexity of mental training

Coach	Raw data	First order theme	Second order theme	General dimension
C4	<i>And I'm very, very interested from very young age in psychology</i>	Interest among the coaches for mental training	The coaches pays interest and see value in mental training	
C4	<i>Yes, I read a lot about it [mental training]. We discuss different cases in a group, I often do it in team meetings on teamX and teamY or what it may be.</i>			
C1	<i>For me, I think it is interesting to read literature about it [mental training], and when you come over stuff... I am open by nature and think it is interesting. Then I try to make it mine, how can I use what I read in theory into my practical day.</i>			
C2	<i>Yes, reading about the subject [mental training] and try to think critically about what I am reading to see if it can be practiced in my context.</i>			
C3	<i>It would be stupid to say that the mental aspect is not important, and likewise with mental training.</i>	The coaches sees value in mental training		
C1	<i>I think that we and many other academies see big value in it [mental training] in some way.</i>			
C4	<i>At least, I see value in it [mental training] for my part.</i>			
C3	<i>In the end, it is to make you a better football player.</i>	Important to develop better football players	Mental training is important to develop as a player and as a person	Mental training is interesting and important in a development context.
C1	<i>... it is in some way an important thing [mental skills] about being a top athlete is what I'm thinking. It can be what differs between the best from the second best</i>			
C4	<i>I think it's [mental training] absolutely crucial for us as a club. It is important that our players have a toolbox [of mental skills/techniques]</i>			
C2	<i>For me, it's [players' mentality] really the most important. This is where everything starts for the players. It can be that players are good technically, but doesn't manage to make the right choices. So for me, it all starts with what's going on the players' minds. What they see, what they think, how they make choices, and eventually the technical execution.</i>			
C2	<i>I think it's very important [mental training], on the same level as having a development plan for the technical and tactical skills.</i>	Important to develop life skills		
C1	<i>We're going to educate the players to run around on that field, and handle to play in front of, yeah not so many thousands here, but they might go somewhere else and play in front of 50-60.000. Then it might not be to hit a simple pass that is important, then it is big pressure and things like that which comes into play.</i>			
C4	<i>I think the goal [with mental training] should be to help the players develop best possible as footballers and people.</i>			
C4	<i>And the way we work with the players mentally, I think it is very important for them later on in life. In life in general is about daring to try, daring to fail and build on from there, it's not just in football. Make them aware of that. So the most important thing is to treat them as people first, I think that is crucial.</i>	Important to develop life skills		
C3	<i>Get good attitudes and discipline in their lifestyle in a way, which I think is very important to take steps. And I hope that they walk out of here, and most won't take the next step here, walk out of here with healthy values and a mindset that they can transfer into other things.</i>			

Table 3: Views on the importance and complexity of mental training (cont.)

C4	<i>How to handle adversity, prosperity and that kind of stuff. If you are picked for a national team, are we prepared to handle the prosperity it brings. Big challenge. Maybe more challenging for youths to handle national team selection.</i>	Handle prosperity and adversity	Challenges players need to handle	Use and scope of mental training
C2	<i>For me, sport psychology is about how the players think, how they react to different stimuli, how they handle uncomfortable situations or adversity.</i>			
C2	<i>It's in the game they need to perform, it's when it is 11 vs 11 they must be good when they get older. So we must try to improve them in the context that they actually are going to be in.</i>	Handle challenges in new and familiar contexts	Challenges players need to handle	Use and scope of mental training
C2	<i>They must be able to handle different contexts.</i>			
C2	<i>... but those who make it, they have the capability to deal with adversity, they handle new contexts very good, they deal with what they're facing, they like to be uncomfortable. They might not like it, but they handle it.</i>	Players need to analyse games	Challenges players need to handle	Use and scope of mental training
C3	<i>Mental training is of course watching games, analyse games for players and such.</i>			
C3	<i>Mental training is so much, it happens all the time. I don't know what mental training includes, but it happens all the time.</i>	Mental training happens all the time	Perception of mental training being a broad topic	Use and scope of mental training
C3	<i>It's a very important topic, and what you mean with mental training can be so much, but the fact that it is a very important topic is no doubt about.</i>	The mental aspect is wide		
C1	<i>The mental aspect is very wide, very big, it is a lot that is included in mental training.</i>			
C3	<i>First of all, they need to love what they are doing. To become the best in anything they have to like it.</i>			
C3	<i>It's about setting demands for themselves, set demands for themselves mentally. You don't need to be striving 100% of the time, but they who cheat on turns on the line when we do running exercise for example, those who take shortcuts all the time... that's what irritates me a lot because they don't have the mental discipline to complete things.</i>	Mental discipline to complete		
C4	<i>It's also about wanting to learn, learn from your mistakes and be curious on what's going on. Why do we do this and that. Ask questions and stuff.</i>	Being curious and learn from mistakes	Mental skills that players need	
C1	<i>They need to have confidence, they must believe in themselves and what they are doing. You say they need to be strong mentally, you must handle adversity because it is through adversity you move forward.</i>	Confidence and mental strength to handle adversity		
C4	<i>Daring to fail. And to be able to self-regulate well. Those we view as good to regulate themselves, those who often challenge norms, and also doesn't necessarily listen to the coaches, I view that as a great skill.</i>	Self-regulate and thinking critically		
C3	<i>Think about yourself, think about how you can develop. Reflecting over what you are doing basically.</i>			

Some of the coaches expressed their interest in psychology and mental training. They read about it on own initiatives, and look for things they can adopt to their own work and context. Some of the coaches argued that mental training is important in general, and sees value in engaging in it. Further, the coaches argued that mental training is important to develop better football players, but it is also important to develop life skills that the players can transform to other aspects later on in life.

Some coaches mentioned that players need to handle both prosperity and adversity while one coach argued that being able to handle challenges and new contexts are important. One coach also stated that players need to analyse games as a part of mental training. Some of the coaches expressed that mental training can mean many things, and mental training goes on all the time. The coaches mentioned different mental skills that players need to have such as discipline to compete, being curious and learning from mistakes, confidence and mental strength to handle adversity, and being able to self-regulate and thinking critically.

5.2 Category two: Methods, routines and communication of mental training

This category consists of several tables, and together they explain the coaches' attitudes and views on the current methods, routines, and communication of mental training in the academy. Table 4, 5 and 6 concerns the existing methods and routines connected to mental training, followed by Table 7 which explains their views on communication on mental training.

5.2.1 Views on current methods and routines concerning mental training in the academy

In this section, three general dimensions emerged. All of which concerned the current methods and routines for mental training in the academy. In the first general dimension (Table 4), the coaches argued that *a unifying mental training programme requires continuity in structures and a pro-active management*. This was based from the two second order themes; (1) lack internal structure and continuity, and (2) the follow-up of the current routines is left to the individual coach. Further on, the next general dimension (Table 5) defines that it is *lack of clarity of the use and purpose of the various mental training tools*. The last general dimension (Table 6) concerns how *mental training is performed on and off the field* in the coaches' eyes. This general dimensions are formed from the two second order themes (1) mental training on the field, and (2) mental training off the field.

Table 4: Views on current methods and routines in the academy

Coach	Raw data	First order theme	Second order theme	General dimension
C2	<i>But it is as I said in the beginning, it's not that structured yet [mental training]</i>			
C2	<i>No. We don't [have methods for mental training]. Not that I'm aware of. It's more common sense and life experience from the coaches.</i>			
C3	<i>It is a little special, because the club does not really have any standardised programme for how we should improve the mental processes of the players, so it depends on the coaches' competences on the different teams.</i>			
C1	<i>We haven't come that far as I see it. It may be there we're at, that we haven't got that far yet with implementing it [mental training] in the different teams, but I think every team has an idea that it need to be implemented though,</i>			
C3	<i>It's not really any structure to it I would say. We want the players to complete Geirs 11 maybe one or two times a year, but it's not anything that say we need to do it, and that we should do so, so many times, not that I have heard of anyway,</i>	Lack of structure and routines		
C3	<i>It may be that there has been routines at it before, but I have never experienced that we have a certain date we should do it [Geirs 11] or anything like that, and I haven't done it on teamX, and I don't think that teamY has done it this year.</i>		Lack of internal structure and continuity	
C3	<i>No routines. Might have been before my time that they have used the Geirs 11, it may be that the model [Geirs 11] has been used before.</i>			
C3	<i>It may be that the players become more aware and get to work on themselves, but it can also be players that don't think about it at all, but we don't know that because we're not following it up [usage of Geirs 11].</i>			
C4	<i>But I think that this [mental training] is a step we are taking in this club eventually when we want to invest in it.</i>	Development		
C1	<i>I feel we are on the right track, but it is not finished what we have started. It has happened a lot after the classification with plans and stuff like that.</i>	slowed down by internal turnover		
C1	<i>We are like halfway in the classification, and changing things after the former leader came and we started with some new plans, but then he left, and those plans were partly finished, but no way neared done.</i>			A unifying mental training programme requires continuity in structures and a pro-active management
C2	<i>It has been changes all the time, people have left and Englishmen and... so unfortunately it has been less of that in the last year and a half that what we want [follow-up and feedback from the management].</i>			
C1	<i>It's more up to every one of the coaches, and I think that we see the value of it [mental training] rather that it comes from above [management] and down to us. It's not that much from there [management] and down, it's more that we on the floor sees that we need to act on it [mental training].</i>	Lack of feedback and follow-ups		
C3	<i>No, we don't get any feedback from the management.</i>	from the		
C4	<i>No, it's nothing [feedback].</i>	management		
C3	<i>No, not that much really. We may be asked about it [mental training] but it's not... like I said it's no standardised program in the club so it's difficult to push something that's not standardised.</i>		The follow-up of mental training programme	
C1	<i>That's how it is in a football club in a way, many people, then it's no one that has control of what the different people are doing.</i>	Coaches operates with too much freedom	is left to the coaches individually	
C1	<i>We coaches' has much freedom, and we've always had that here in the club, maybe a little too much freedom to do what we like, and it becomes a bit random who works on different things.</i>			

There has been a lack of structure and routines existing in the academy concerning mental training, according to the academy coaches. They also believed that internal changes have slowed down the investment in mental training. All coaches expressed that there is little or no feedback from the management concerning mental training, and one coach argued that they operate with a lot of freedom, maybe too much.

Table 5: Views on current methods and routines in the academy (cont.)

C4	<i>Reporting on wellness every morning, reporting in RPE [Rating of Perceived Exertion] where they rate how hard the workout was after the workout is over and such things. That's discipline.</i>	Wellness and RPE as tools for discipline	
C2	<i>We use be your best, their VR [Virtual Reality] glasses and their software. But that's more on the orientation bit, and not so much on how they handle adversity and challenges. Well, it is challenges, but it is more about the ability to orientate on the field.</i>	VR as a tool for mental training	
C4	<i>We have entered an agreement with be your best with VR glasses and the orientation bit. So we're on to something there. That's also mental training. It's really exciting.</i>		
C2	<i>I believe that by doing the Geirs 11 [mental skill tool], they [players] may get more aware of the different topics that are involved in the Geirs 11. But it's not systematically followed-up</i>		
C3	<i>We have talked about that Geirs 11 where it is a lot of questions and stuff like that. I'm thinking to do it a little by little.</i>		
C3	<i>We have taken elements from it [Geirs 11] and used it in some different questions. You don't have to reinvent the wheel again, it is really good, but it is about using it sensibly I think.</i>		Lack of clarity of the use and purpose of the various mental training tools
C4	<i>Picking up unusual things you identify there [for the coaches] compared to what we feel. We compare... we are also filling out for the player and compare [Geirs 11]. Which questions... is it big differences here and why. And is it something that the player is struggling with that we haven't seen before. Things like that.</i>		
C3	<i>If the coaches fill out the same we get a ... not a gap-analysis, but a spider web thing, I don't remember. But you can see the value of it and see if you and the player agree. So that's one thing we can use it for [Geirs 11], and it is a nice reminder for us coaches to see different things that we need to work on.</i>	Geirs 11 as a useful tool	
C4	<i>... but it is absolutely, not too often, but it can be very good for them [players] to reflect over such things [Geirs 11].</i>		
C2	<i>It gives the basis to talk to the player, because the player is filling it [Geirs 11] out, then we are filling it out [coaches], then it shows a gap-analysis were we see the deviations between players and coaches. Maybe I believe that a player has more of this or less of that, then the player may think he has much of this. It can be used in player conversations to discuss. And it gives a good picture of how a player thinks, so it is a very good tool.</i>		Varying attitudes to the utility of Geirs 11
C1	<i>It [Geirs 11] can be used to arrest people. They can suggest that they are good at something, then they show something different on the field. It may have something to it.</i>		
C4	<i>I think it [Geirs 11] can be to comprehensive. It's to many questions, and maybe a little difficult questions. It is maybe suited to first team level, and people already mentally developed. So it is important to not make it too complicated because then they [players] just fall out and just press on something.</i>		
C1	<i>It's [Geirs 11] very comprehensive, and it goes deep into the players' heads. And I think we are starting in the wrong end if we start by clashing a questionnaire in front of the players. I think we need to build stone by stone and understand the different elements in the model, and it doesn't need to be align as a model, but just something we coaches has to build on and teach the players. Then it can be an evaluation maybe.</i>	Geirs 11 too comprehensive and	
C1	<i>I'm afraid that the form [Geirs 11 Tool] is being used as a "yeah, we have used it, now we have done mental training". It's not mental training, it's a screening or what we call it.</i>	something to check of the list	
C2	<i>You feel that it is more a... just something you have to get through [Geirs 11], just to say that you have completed it rather that it actually improves the players, that's my opinion.</i>		
C4	<i>For some, good reflection as they think about things and grow up. Others, I think is just checking of. That's the difference. [Geirs 11].</i>		

The coaches discussed various tools that can be used in different ways for mental training. Some coaches mentioned wellness and RPE (Rating of Perceived Exertion) tools that the players need to fill out everyday (wellness), and after every practice (RPE) as tools that could develop discipline. Some coaches mentioned VR (Virtual Reality) as a tool to work on the mental skills of orientation and vision. However, all coaches discussed the Geirs 11 as a tool for mental training. All coaches had some positive attitudes towards this tool as it could make the players reflect on themselves and their mental skills, as well as picking up unusual things. For example, a player can show signs of concern that the coaches need to address, or factors that the coaches need to work on when organising practice sessions. Some of the coaches also expressed some concerns if they were to rely too much on this tool for mental training. The tool could be to comprehensive with too many and complicated

questions. One coach also stated that the tool is rather a screening of the players' mental abilities, and not directly mental training.

Table 6: Views on current methods and routines in the academy (cont.)

C4	<i>One-on-one conversations is very important for everyone in all contexts, no matter what you are doing</i>		
C3	<i>It's a lot of talk after matches, and then it is a lot of the mentally there, absolutely.</i>		
C3	<i>We trigger them and challenging them through the dialog we have with the players on the field before, during and after training.</i>	One to one and team conversations with players	
C4	<i>We try to talk one-to-one with the players as often as we can before this corona thing, like after games and such. Other than that there is not that much direct mental training, but it is running feedback, and conversation in pauses and things like that.</i>		
C4	<i>It's more about how I behave in front of them at the field, in the locker-room, when I text with them and that part. And what I say to them and stuff like that.</i>		Mental training on the field
C2	<i>It's in the game they are going to perform, it is 11 vs 11 they need to be good, when they get older. So we have to try and improve them in the context they actually are going to be in. That's what I'm thinking.</i>		
C2	<i>So it [mental training] should be based from what happens on the field, that's where the player should perform. That's kind of the top of the cake, then there is a gradually increasing downward when we design situations.</i>	Mental training through drills at the field	
C3	<i>How you construct drills, how you lead the group, what you say to them, what you don't say to them and things like that. Maybe the mental part comes in the whole time at each session..</i>		
C3	<i>It is, I'm thinking that it is to trigger players on different things, it can be in drills, it can be in games. Okay, say we are under 2-0, constructing that, how do we act then to get a reaction in a way.</i>		
C3	<i>It is what we do on the field, but it's more unconsciously in a way, it is hard to say now we work 10% on the mental part.</i>		
C1	<i>We work a lot with orientation which is part of the mentality.</i>		
C4	<i>On Monday for example, we're hopefully going to a room up on the high school where they can do either Be Your Best [VR], or analysing [football games] or something else connected to mental training. Additionally, get homework, either to analyse games or other things connected to football cases.</i>		Mental training performed on and off the field
C4	<i>It is to give them feedback during games. They also gather moments, that they feel are worth it, to a presentation about their year, with the coaches as audience. They do PowerPoint or something and talk about themselves and what they have done throughout the year.</i>	Video analysis	
C4	<i>I feel the plenum meetings... if it's done too often it becomes a bit monotone and a little... some get something out of it, others not so much. The first meetings were very, very inspiring actually, and then it is sort of the same after a while.</i>	Plenum meetings	
C4	<i>Describe themselves when we have meetings three times a year. We want to do it even more, where they describe themselves and their goals, and strengths and weaknesses as well when we have the yearly meeting before the season.</i>		
C1	<i>I believe it is a lot to gain from performance enhancement training, but at the same time it is important that we start in the right end, we need to know who the player is, where we are, what is the identity of the player. I think we have a lot to gain from both [performance enhancement techniques and existential psychology]. I don't think it's one or the other direction.</i>	Focus on identity	Mental training off the field
C1	<i>It's very important to not go straight to skills and football stuff, I think it is very important to use time on who the person actually is through conversations during the day and on the field, yeah in everything.</i>		
C3	<i>We work a lot with visualization and stuff like that, that's part of the mentality. So we encourage the players to do that.</i>		
C3	<i>We have done a bit now, under the corona period, where they [players] have got some tasks where they should work on visualization for 5-10 minutes every day.</i>	Use of visualisation	
C1	<i>To work on visualization. To see situations in front of you on a football field, but also in everyday life. How do I think when I'm in a real game, been in a situation often where I have the choice to do the difficult pass, the challenging pass, or hit a safe pass for example.</i>		

The coaches argued that mental training can be done through communication on the field and in the locker room, through drills during sessions, and in matches. Off the field, mental training can be done through video analysis work, meetings that focuses on mental training, use of visualisation, and by focusing on the players' identity using different methods.

5.2.2 Views on current communication on the topic in the academy

This section provided one general dimension (Table 7) concerning communication on mental training in the academy, which is a *need for formalised and common discussions about mental training* in the academy.

Table 7: Views on current communication on the topic in the academy

Coach	Raw data	First order theme	Second order theme	General dimension
C3	<i>Well, we discuss a lot about this. How the academy can develop further. We have these meetings often and this topic [mental training] is up for discussion often.</i>	The topic is discussed a lot	Various views of the scope of mental training discussions	Need for formalised and common discussions about mental training
C4	<i>Yes, I would say that is the strength in the academy, it's a lot of informal conversations where we coaches discuss basically everything really, and we often talk about the mental part.</i>			
C2	<i>Yes, I put it up for discussion often. Especially with the academy leader and the former academy leader when he was here, I was involved in the discussion.</i>			
C4	<i>No, we do it too little I think. It's more practical things. It can be about players, "now he's this and this way, and we need to work with him". And can we make drills and stuff like that.</i>	The topic is discussed too little		
C2	<i>It's not that much [discussion about mental training] at the main coaches table. There it is more football that is discussed.</i>			
C4	<i>So it is a lot informal, so we could be better to do it more formal and put it on the agenda when we have these tactical and weekly meetings I think.</i>			
C4	<i>The biggest part of it [mental training] is not discussed as much... it is not I think. And it may be the boss' responsibility as the academy leader, that it is him that has to encourage such discussions. But absolutely, we should. And I hope we see the value in it both in short and long term, and that we do it even more.</i>			
C4	<i>Also, I think we need to discuss between us coaches how we can use it practically on the field [mental training]. Learn from each other's teamtalks, what we say before training. And we are very open here, we see a lot of each other's practices, and we're good at giving each other tips. So that something we could systemise even more, how we do it on the field.</i>	A need for more systemized discussions about		
C4	<i>No, it is like when we have these meetings, that I would like to have more of, it comes up some times [mental training]...</i>	mental training and methods		
C1	<i>Those who has been at the course [mental training course by NTF] has more competence than the rest of us, but it may be that the value from that course should have been bigger though. In terms of that we should have set out more time to talk about what they learned from the course.</i>			
C1	<i>We have actually not had so much meetings about it, that I've been to anyway, about mental training, but that's absolutely something we should go through because it is an extremely important area.</i>			

The coaches had different experiences and opinions of the degree of discussion about mental training in the academy. Three coaches argued that it is a topic that is regularly discussed among the coaches, but the forums mentioned varied from meetings, informal conversations, and individual conversations between a coach and the academy leader. Two coaches expressed that they felt there is little discussion about mental training.

They felt that discussions in the academy usually concerned football cases and practical matters. However, it seems to be a wish to establish more structure in terms of discussing the topic. The coaches argued that it can be done in different ways, and discussing more about it in the weekly meetings was mentioned, as well as learning from each other on the field and in the locker room. There is however uncertainty of who's responsibility it is to engage such conversations and discussions. If it is the coaches or the academy leader's

responsibility is not clear, which suggest that there is a need for more structure for formal discussions on the topic in the academy.

5.3 Category three: Future of mental training in the academy

This category concerns the coaches' views on future needs considering a mental training programme, and consists of three tables. The three tables consist in total of two general dimensions; (1) *external competence to develop and guide a standardised programme is desired*, and (2) *the programme should be long term and adapt to the academy's context*.

5.3.1 Views on future needs concerning a mental training programme

The first general dimension (Table 8) defines the needs and limitations concerning a mental training programme and the desire to get external help to develop a such a programme. It consists of one first order theme and two second order themes. The second general dimension (Table 9 and 10) considers that the programme should be long term and adopt to the academies context. It consists of the three second order themes; (1) the programme should be custom to the academy's context, (2) the programme must take the coaches time and players total load into consideration, and (3) the programme should differentiate the training depending on players' stage of development.

Table 8: Views on future needs concerning a mental training programme

Coach	Raw data	First order theme	Second order theme	General dimension
C3	<i>That we take steps there [mentally] can be crucial. Both that we and the players take new steps. Absolutely.</i>			
C2	<i>We have, I think, the resources and capacity, and want to develop it [mental training program].</i>			
C1	<i>Yes, I think it's really exciting [structuring a mental training program].</i>			
C4	<i>Now I think it is to establish a structure and understanding of what it takes to implement it, which can be a big challenge.</i>	Standardised programme seen as desirable and advantageous		
C2	<i>I think it can be a big advantage to have a standardised program for how we develop players mentally. Then we have something to work from and what we should do, and it can be different from 14 to 16 to Molde 2 and to senior.</i>			
C2	<i>I think it's better to have something written and a plan for things, and to have a basis on it. That we have it as a reference, that's how we work on mental training, and the more we do it, it may come up things that should be added in the standardised program, or that there is something that we do that we find out that "okay, this doesn't work, and we take it away".</i>			
C1	<i>Not good enough, no way [if the academy is prepared to develop a program on their own]. I think we either have to get the knowledge our self, that competence, or we need to get people here who can train us. If the club sees a big value in it in terms of developing better players, then we have to get that competency from elsewhere, or we need to be sent on courses.</i>	Need for course and training		
C4	<i>No, we're not prepared yet. We have to prepare. We could not have started right now. We need training and coursing and so.</i>			
C4	<i>We who sit here have a lot of competence on football and very limited on the theoretical on other things, so honest we have to be.</i>	Limited knowledge beyond football	Need to extend the current competence through courses and external guidance	External competence to develop and guide a standardised programme is desired
C3	<i>When it comes to football things we have competence here. When it comes to other cases we need help form elsewhere.</i>			
C2	<i>No, we have to work on establishing a standardised program that is a part of our overall plans. We can do it by maybe engage someone with competence on the area, that's my opinion.</i>			
C2	<i>So we have everything we need except maybe someone with competence that could contribute in the elaboration of a program.</i>	Need to bring in external competence		
C3	<i>It is possible to use NTF and such. It depends what we need to do in terms of mental training.</i>			
C4	<i>I think we can maybe gain a lot by looking at other parts of the world, for example Bayern Munich which is very exciting.</i>			
C4	<i>I want to connect with the college [Molde university college, because they have some competence on the topic.</i>			
C1	<i>Yes, that would be good, but I don't think it is economically responsible to hire someone like that right now. But you can think why not. You have a physical coach, you have football coaches, you have keeper coaches, why not have a mental coach in one or the other context.</i>	Resources can be a challenge		
C1	<i>It's an exciting thought, but I don't think it's viable in Norwegian football as of today to have a mental coach, but I would think that those top clubs and top academies in Europe has it. But I don't think we're there yet in Norwegian football. I have to be honest and say that, maybe unfortunately, but I think so.</i>			
C3	<i>As I said, mental training is big, and when it comes to football and so, we [coaches] should be involved. But with other thinks, if we have resources to it, can be done by others, absolutely.</i>		Challenges that needs to be taken into consideration concerning external assistance	
C4	<i>Optimally I think that we should have one that follows it up, which is educated in sport psychology, but that depends on resources.</i>			
C4	<i>Yes, it may be a challenge that they don't understand the context and the club, and football. If it's just a psychiatrist for example. They have to understand what it means to be involved in football.</i>	External help needs to understand football context		

Looking at the first general dimension, we can see that it consists of one first order theme and two second order themes. In the first order theme, the coaches expressed a desire to implement a standardised mental training programme in the academy. They suggested that it can be advantageous. However, in the second order themes the coaches argued that there may be a need for courses and external help. They argued that there is limited knowledge beyond football in the academy, and there is a need for coursing and training on the subject of mental training. The coaches also mentioned challenges that needs to be taken into consideration concerning external assistance. If someone were to be brought in to help developing a programme, the club need to have resources available. The external person(s) that may be recruited need to understand the football context that the academy is operating in.

Table 9: Views on future needs concerning a mental training programme (cont.)

C3	<i>So I think that we have to take step by step and we must take small steps in terms of what we're doing, so it doesn't become too much at once. That we do it properly.</i>		
C4	<i>When we get structured how it should be done, it should be about small drips along the way. Small learnings, influence little by little, without this being a school lecture. It should be small drips and it can be five minutes before a training session, it can be things that goes through a cycle.</i>	Implementing mental training	
C1	<i>But it is as he said [sport psychologist], you can't do much in an hour or two, it is a long term thing, but it was okay to get a wake-up call. But I think if we're going to work on the mentality, then there is not just to set out two, three hours and say now we have done it, now we're finished with it.</i>	should be a long-term project	
C1	<i>That's why I'm thinking that we should work on it the whole time really, every day on the field, in the locker room before training, in the locker room after training, when we have meetings and have an evaluation or briefing form the session. Then we would go get into many of the things Geir Jordet is talking about in that 11.</i>		The program should be custom to the academy's context
C3	<i>More structured things that the players put in during their day as a normal training in a way.</i>		
C3	<i>Additionally, get homework, either to analyse games or other things connected to football cases, in a way, where they have to do something. I think it will be more structured later on.</i>		
C1	<i>Okay, say we're down 2-0, construct that, how do we act to get a reaction in a way. So it is things like that I think that we implement consciously or unconsciously.</i>		
C1	<i>That's why I'm thinking that we should work on it the whole time really, every day on the field, in the locker room before training, in the locker room after training, when we have meetings and have an evaluation or briefing form the session.</i>	The program should be customized to the club context	
C2	<i>It is in some way a basis, so we can see how players can develop in our context. It can be putting players in different situations to improve the area that you wish, dealing with adversity for example. That you plan before a session that his team is down 2-0 when we start. How does he handle that, what's his reaction to such a setting. Or it can be the other way, that his team is up 2-0, how is his reaction then. Should he ease of or should he go on and kill the game.</i>		The programme should be long term and adapt to context
C2	<i>In the end, it is about making the players better on the field. So it should come from what's happening on the field, that's where the player needs to perform.</i>		
C2	<i>You have to think thoroughly if you're going to implement something that you've read, that are based on some subjective experience of another coach. We have to look after that when we're developing our own program for mental training. That it is suited our context and that it is based on objectivity and not subjective experiences.</i>		
C3	<i>In other countries they have schools, in Norway also, schools that is on the same places as they train, and it's easier to access them.</i>		
C1	<i>I have thought about that football is so complex, it's so many things you have to go through and if you are going to do more of something, then you might have to do less of other things because you have X amount of hours on and off the field with a group.</i>	Limited access to the players	
C3	<i>Say in our situation here, they have school and we have time between 10 and 12 [at school] and afternoons. So it is about using it best possible.</i>		
C3	<i>And it is about the whole package with players, what they do in a day, how tired they get, how much stimulus can they take in terms of school, schoolwork and tests and all that, additionally to all the mental training that we throw at them.</i>	Have to take players day into consideration	The program must take the coaches time and players total load into consideration
C1	<i>They of course go to school and things like that which makes it difficult to get such stuff done during the day, and afternoons/evenings they have football practice, then they have friends, family, so it is kind of a total package on the 24-hour athlete.</i>		
C1	<i>But it is like we feel that in a day, it goes so fast that not all can be prioritised.</i>		
C4	<i>The problem is that the days goes so fast and there is so much that it is hard to have control over everything, I do understand that, for the management as well.</i>	Not enough time to prioritise everything	

In the second general dimension, the coaches argued that mental training should be a long term project, and they need to take step by step to not get overwhelmed or overwhelm the players. They also argued that the mental training programme need to fit in with the existing routines going on in the academy, and be custom to a football context. Furthermore, the coaches argued that they have limited access to the players, as they have school and other things going on in their life. That is why the coaches and the programme need to take the players days into consideration. Further, the coaches discuss how there is limited time to prioritise everything, suggesting the programme should overlap or be implemented in the daily practice of the club.

Table 10: Views on future needs concerning a mental training programme (cont.)

C4	<i>But it is many questions so we have thought about making it ours, which I think is important, and to divide into different age, or teams [Geirs 11].</i>				
C1	<i>I would like to think that this is something we should do more of, but you can't just make them [players] sit her for hours and working on this [mental training], they are young players, and it is about hitting the right time and age group.</i>	Customised training to different age groups			
C1	<i>I think it is to implement it and get a more, what should I say, logistics for how we do things out of the field, with what we can do with the different groups and sit down so often.</i>				
C2	<i>and that we periodise from the different year groups so it becomes like a development plan until their Molde 2 players.</i>				
C3	<i>The boys are different, right. Some need more, what should I say, more scolded than others. Others need more of a clap on the shoulder. It's stuff like that.</i>				
C3	<i>... then there is someone who learns fast, then there is someone who never learn anything. Almost.</i>				
C3	<i>So it is like that, and it is very different form person to person. Some are very school bright and very good at school, and has more resources than other. And there is some that has a negative attitude towards such mental training in the first place.</i>				
C3	<i>On the group 16-19, they are not so experienced, but it is like "oh, we have to do one more thing" and "we have to do this and that". A little sceptical in the first place I guess.</i>				
C3	<i>But I do think that many of the players find it [mental training] interesting.</i>		Take player	Differentiate the	The
C1	<i>It's not that many that work on mental stuff [on individual goals], some might have something with leadership skills and such things that can be connected to mentality.</i>		differentiations into	training depending on	programme should be long
C3	<i>Just that you make it... make it interesting [mental training], and that's not easy, they are very different person to person.</i>		consideration	players stage of development	term and adapt to context
C1	<i>Some need it more than others [mental training]. But some has it on the early development goals, so in that degree you can say that we work individually with players. But it's more from what they feel themselves.</i>				
C4	<i>Yes, I focus a lot on the mental part, and it depends a lot on who I'm talking to. You do get to know the players eventually, and it is important for us coaches to get to know how the players are as people, how they handle different situations so we can build from it, and know how they think.</i>				
C2	<i>we should not overestimate how smart they [players] are. Sometimes they have to be told what's right and what's wrong, and how things is.</i>				
C1	<i>Some are very good at working at the physical because they think that's important, then coach1 thinks that they need to work a lot on the mentality because that's important, then coach2 says "no, no, the tactical" and all such things. So therefore, it's not good enough control on what each teams are doing concerning the four elements that we work from</i>	The program should take the coaches			
C4	<i>In our training day we are very different, I'm different from the other coaches, and they are different from each other, and we have to understand that it really affects the players what we say how we handle things. So the biggest challenge is that we are different, we think different about things.</i>	differentiations into consideration			

The programme should also take into consideration that people are different, according to the coaches. This relates to different aspects in the academy. Firstly, the programme needs to be customised to different age groups, meaning the youngest and the older groups should not work the same way on developing their mentality. Secondly, the programme should take into consideration that players are different. People are different, and players have different mental skills and abilities which suggest that not all players should be treated the same way in different situations. Lastly, the programme should take the coaches differentiations into consideration. As with players, coaches are different. They are different in terms of ways of working, as well as mentally and personally different.

6.0 Discussion

In this chapter, the findings presented in *5.0 Findings* will be discussed in light of theory and context. The setup of *6.0 Discussion* is recognizable by continuing the three deductively developed categories from the previous chapter as headings. Further, inductively developed subheadings will be used that describes the various findings to keep a natural flow for the discussion. Each subheading is introduced by one or more quotes that are considered to bring relevance and immediate contextual insight to the discussions that follows. Quotes are also used in the text when applicable. Theory that is accounted for in the literature review is essential when discussing the findings. Obviously to compare current findings to the previous, but it is also worth reminding the reader that the motivation theories, the literature reviewed and contextual information had a significant influence in shaping the interview guide in the first place. This means that the influence of various sources is by far broader than the actual references that are visibly used in the discussion chapter. That said, this chapter aims to discuss and hopefully give some deeper insights and explanations to the research question of which attitudes the Aker academy coaches possess towards mental training, and their current routines in that respect.

6.1 Category one: Competence, importance and complexity of mental training

Category one uncovered the (1) coaches' attitudes, views and opinions about the competence on mental training in the academy, (2) and their views on the importance and the complexity of mental training, (3) as central to their view of and approach to mental training. These findings are extensively discussed in the below sections.

6.1.1 Views on competence in mental training in the academy

“I feel we have these, call it the four elements of physics, tactical, technical, mental, and I feel that that we have come further in the physical, technical, tactical than we have in the mental, it sorts of struggles to hang on.” C4

The above statement from C4, illustrates how mental training had traditionally been given the least amount of focus in the Aker academy out of what they call the four elements

(physical, technical, tactical, mental). The coaches expressed that mental training was not prioritised, which according to motivation literature might have implications on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2002; Harter, 1978; White, 1959). People tend to be motivated to participate in activities that brings intrinsic rewards and good feelings (White, 1959). In other words, when the coaches recognize that tasks considering mental training is not important, it is less likely that they place considerable efforts in these tasks. They may feel that mental training is not worth spending time and energy on, and therefore tend to rather engage in activities that may show more tangible results, such as physical and technical training. Working on areas where the coaches feels more competent brings the coaches more enjoyment and intrinsic rewards into work, as well as motivation to face and deal with their environment (Harter, 1978). This seem relevant in the current study as the coaches acknowledged a lack of knowledge in mental training amongst them. Lack of knowledge is the most discussed barricade in literature on roadblocks when implementing mental training and mental training programs (Freitas et al., 2013; Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel 2013; Gould and Damarjian, 1998).

Another factor that was seen as a missing link to learning was the limited focus on mental training in their football education. As the consequence was that mental training (as compared to tactical, technical, physical) seemed to be the hardest to keep track on, this challenge is likely to count for more than only the Aker academy coaches. All the academy coaches are educated with mostly football courses and coaching courses provided by the Norwegian football federation and UEFA. This raise the question of whether a similar problem applies for their colleagues in other Norwegian academies, and even colleagues in Europe. Although the UEFA based coach education might slightly differ across countries, and some countries may focus more on the mental element than others, the limitation that is uncovered among the participants might well count for others as well. If coaches are supposed to include mental training in their practice (as the academy classification programme demands), or even work on them at all, one can assume that facilitating of such competence as part of their coach training is required.

An interesting finding related to the coaches lack of competence in mental training is that there is a lack of courses on the subject. This seems to be a wider concern as Smedley (2013) reported that coaches expressed that there is a lack of availability of sport psychology services. If there is a lack of focus on mental training in formal football education, and there

are few opportunities to develop competence on the subject on own initiatives through courses, there seem to be a big challenge to obtain knowledge on how to conduct mental training. To complete the vicious circle, the coaches also expressed that there are few initiatives from the wider coach community in Norway and even in Europe. The reasons why the accessibility to competence is limited might have both structural, cultural and financial explanations. The tradition in professional football is described as aversive when it comes to academia and related education in British football (Kelly, 2017) and psychological assistance has been for “the weak” in the same culture (Nesti, 2010). These factors may suggest that mental training and sport psychology have not had a high standing in football culture, and clubs and federations may traditionally only have seen the player and how they can improve their performances and not the person behind the player.

For the Aker academy’s case, it seems to be a complex issue however, as the coaches explained that there was an opportunity to send two coaches on a mental training course, provided by NTF not long ago, which suggest that the mentioned traditions are changing. The coaches claimed that this was a good opportunity and initiative, but argued that more of the coaches should have had the same opportunity to gain the knowledge. The lack of existing courses and limitations of participating coaches in such courses might rely on financial arguments (Smedley, 2013), as both NTF and the Aker academy budgets also involves priorities. Of particular interest in the current context, is that the academy coaches reported interest to gain knowledge and competence. However, internal challenges such as lack of pro-activeness to find development opportunities for coaches on the subject, and external challenges, such as lack of courses and lack of focus on mental training in education, needs to be overcome.

6.1.2 Views on the importance and complexity of mental training

“For me, I think it is interesting to read literature about it [mental training], and when you come over stuff... I am open by nature and think it is interesting. Then I try to make it mine: How can I use what I read in theory into my practical day?”. C1.

“It would be stupid to say that the mental aspect is not important, and likewise with mental training”. C3.

Even though the coaches acknowledged a lack of competence in mental training in the academy, they expressed interest and viewed it as important. Their attitudes are not uncommon: Previous research on coaches' attitudes towards mental training has similarly found that coaches tend to view sport psychology and mental training as essential and important (Halerman et al., 2020; Freitas et al., 2013; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013). Halerman and colleagues (2020) even argue that some coaches view mental training as important as strength and conditioning: It can give a team an advantage or setting them apart. The Aker academy coaches also claimed that they see value in mental training. To see value in their engagement with mental training is considered as essential to eventually reach results from such activities (Halerman et al., 2020). The coaches argued that mental training can help players to develop as footballers and as persons. This holistic approach to mental training is not always the given attitude among coaches. According to research on the topic, coaches tend to be more positive towards sport psychology and mental training if it leads to better performances on the field. Such coaches seem to prefer performance enhancement techniques such as imagery, goal-setting, and self-talk, rather than focusing on players' personal problems and insecurities (Michel, 2013; Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013). This "quick fix" tendency recognized in the literature might refer to the pressure to succeed in the short termism involved in the professional sport context (Kelly, 2008; Arnulf, 2011). This can arguably be evident also in the Aker academy context, as some statements from the coaches supports this tendency to use mental training for developing good footballers:

"I think it's [mental training] absolutely crucial for us as a club. It is important that our players have a toolbox [of mental skills/techniques]". C4.

"In the end, it [mental training] is to make you a better football player". C3.

A football academy, as previously mentioned in light of context, is in nature a place where players should develop rather than primarily focus on performance. In this regard, scholars suggest that mental training programs should combine performance enhancement techniques and an approach to assist players' mental health, for example by using counselling (Chase, 2011; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). Counselling or similar services can enhance players' wellbeing as well as helping them to deal with stress and anxiety both in their profession and life in general. Combining counselling with other forms of mental training could be a

path for the Aker academy coaches to follow, given their view of mental training as important for also developing life skills:

“The way we work with the players mentally, I think it is very important for them later on in life. In life in general is about daring to try, daring to fail and build on from there, it’s not just in football. Make them aware of that. So the most important thing is to treat them as people first, I think that is crucial”. C4.

“Get good attitudes and discipline in their lifestyle in a way, which I think is very important to take steps. And I hope that they walk out of here... and most won’t take the next step here. Walk out of here with healthy values and a mindset that they can transfer into other things”. C3.

Similar to other people, footballers face challenges in life that need to be handled. If they learn how to handle, they will be better prepared for the various difficulties that “life” throws at them (Podlog, 2016; Bolter & Weiss, 2016; Jones, 2012). Players that have developed mental skills such as for example handling adversity, uncertainty, and self-regulation, are likely better prepared to deal with injuries and illness. They are also found better prepared to deal with various challenges if they do not reach elite level, and have to make a living outside of football (Podlog, 2016; Bolter & Weiss, 2016; Jones, 2012). This may be why the Aker academy coaches argued that it is important to learn transferable life skills, as they stated that most of the players in academies will not reach a level which allows them to make a living of football. The general idea is that the academy coaches might need to be more patient with the players’, and perhaps also pay attention to the person behind the player, as it might be vital both in light of the need for time to develop talents and demography. Molde is a small town compared to bigger academies with “unlimited” access to players. They need to make more out of less. This might shape the mindset of the coaches and their interest to develop the mental and personal aspect in training.

The coaches interest can be utilized by the academy to their advantage, as coaches can have a big influence on the players’ perception towards sport psychology and mental training (Martin et al., 2012; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013; Halerman et al., 2020; Freitas et al., 2013). Evident in various in research, player stigmas toward mental training and sport psychology consultants is a significant challenge to successfully implement mental training programmes (Gould and Damarjian, 1998; Freitas et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2012; Michel,

2013), meaning that coaches that believe in such methods and appear as role models are likely to make a difference. This can help the academy to potentially overcome resistance in the culture (Halerman et al., 2020).

6.1.3 Use and scope of mental training

“How to handle adversity, prosperity and that kind of stuff. If you are picked for a national team, are we prepared to handle the prosperity it brings. Big challenge. Maybe more challenging for youths to handle national team selection”. C4.

“...those who make it: They have the capability to deal with adversity, they handle new contexts very well, they deal with what they’re facing, they enjoy being uncomfortable. They might not like it, but they can handle it”. C2.

Handling prosperity and adversity were the most frequently mentioned and discussed mental skills by the coaches. These are also included among the mental characteristics that describes a professional football player according to NTF and “The Geirs 11 Model” (Olafsen, 2019; Jordet, 2019). In the academy classification programme, NTF suggest Geirs 11 as a tool for improving players. When reviewing the spectrum of methods and models available, there is somewhat unclear which are more useful than others. Given the variety of needs across clubs, a critical inspection of which approach fits the best to the context should be a useful exercise. For example, could the Wheel of Excellence fit to the Aker academy context through its emphasis focus, commitment, mental readiness, positive images, confidence, distraction control, and ongoing learning (Orlick, 2008)? Or could Hardwood’s (2008) 5C’s model that focuses on Commitment, Communication, Concentration, Control, and Confidence be another model that could contribute to develop skills that the academy coaches highlighted. Out of the literature on athlete challenges, there might be other skills that they would need to develop linked to their context, like age and various roles. Such as demands and expectations in the wake of being both students and athletes. Overload and role conflicts in this regard may lead to unhealthy anxiety and depression (Halerman et al., 2020).

The Life Development Intervention (LDI) framework, and an existential approach to psychology in the academy, can assist players to deal with such issues and develop life skills. Life skills are important as they can be transferred to other domains in life, and can be

important for players both in professional life and in everyday life to handle life changes, adversity and prosperity. LDI and existential psychology might be useful approaches for the current Aker academy context in their aim to deal with various issues and problems in a holistic manner (Aoyagi and Poczwadowski, 2016, Nesti, 2004). The LDI helps players and athletes to view changes or challenges as opportunities, as well as assisting them make the most out of these opportunities and personal growth will be the preferable outcome of such changes (Danish et al., 1993; Aoyagi and Poczwadowski, 2016). Existential psychology supports the players process in getting aware of their “true” identity and eventually authenticity (Nesti, 2004). The overall idea is that players who manage outside the field perform better on the field in the long run. By having support around the players, helping them solve problems, or just having someone to talk to, can help players be able to focus more on what they need to do while on practice or in games (Nesti, 2004). In this regard, preparing the coaches in how to support players psychologically in sufficient ways, might be an expedient procedure to reach broadly and simultaneously at the same time overcome the financial and time limitations that might exist. However, Halerman and colleagues (2020) reported that student-athletes use counselling and psychological services at a lower rate than non-athletes do. Using their influence, coaches can express the importance of such services and make it a cultural norm that it is okay to use such services (Halerman et al., 2020). Constructing a programme that takes all challenges into consideration seem difficult, and the academy coaches as well as the literature express the large usage and scope of mental training. It is however important to develop a mental training programme that fits to the players, as it may contribute to help players grow personally from where they are and it can provide them with the mental competence they need to make it in their sport (Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013).

6.2 Category two: Methods, routines and communication of mental training

This category considered the coaches’ attitudes towards the existing methods and routines in the academy. Four general dimensions emerged from the analysis in the tables, namely (1) a unifying mental training programme requires continuity in structures and a pro-active management, (2) lack of clarity of the use and purpose of the various mental training tools,

(3) mental training performed on and off the field, and (4) need for formalised and common discussions about mental training.

6.2.1 Continuity in structure and a pro-active management

“It is a little special, because the club does not really have any standardised programme for how we should improve the mental processes of the players, so it depends on the coaches’ competences in the different teams”. C3.

In football academies, and normally in Norwegian academies, coaches are responsible for most activities for their team. This suggest that a football coach need to have a broad set of knowledge and expertise. Yet, the coaches felt that they lacked the necessary knowledge to work on the players’ mental skills adequately. That makes this finding interesting, as the coaches suggested that there is a lack of structure, routines and plans considering mental training. The coaches discussed what could be a reason for why the investment in mental training has been slowed down. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the Aker academy has had multiple managerial changes over the last few years. Previous research has shown that leaders tend to have a need to find the right balance between change and stability (Mintzberg, 1973; Sayles, 1964), and it depends on the distribution of responsibilities of who is in charge of finding that balance. In this case, that seems to be the academy management, at least that is what the coaches are implying. This may have affected structures, routines and plans in the academy, as frequent changes in management can often be a challenge in organizations because leaders may implement changes in the organization in both functional and philosophical ways (Kelly, 2017).

Based on the changes in the management in recent years, it may suggest that there have been transformational changes over a short period of time in the academy, and balancing between change and stability may have been difficult, making it challenging for both coaches and leaders to keep track of operations in the academy. Additionally, the Aker academy has probably made changes according to the NTFs academy classification which simultaneously have overlapped with internal, managerial changes. Eventually, the result of changes (initiated by others) have “shaped the suit” that the current leader has to carry. This is not necessarily ideal when it comes to the motivational impact of autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and authentic leadership (Fusco et al., 2015), if the management has to work towards

goals that is not set by itself. Using the Geirs 11 can be viewed as an external “demand” as the model is suggested by NTF for more structure on mental training. As there is a lack of competence in mental training in the academy, it is understandable that building from what NTF suggest, and implementing it may look as the easiest option. This seems to be the case, and what the previous leaders had done, as “The Geirs 11 Tool” had already existed in the academy for a couple of years. To lead after changes that has been implemented from other parties than the leader himself, and that the leader may lack knowledge of can be demanding. Consequences of this may be a leader that can be perceived as absent and unenthusiastic in an otherwise energetic dialog about mental training. If there is a lack of competence in mental training, it can affect the leaders’ communication and trustworthiness about the subject in a negative way (Herskedal, 2017).

The situation that neither the leader nor the coaches has been involved in the development of the tool can have a negative effect. It can lead to a lack of ownership towards the tool and routines among the staff, and a lack of motivation to use the tool if the workforce is not included in the formalisation of strategies and plans (Steiner, 1979; Kotter, 1996). If changes and routines are perceived as forced, it may be difficult to motivate the coaches to follow the routines (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The lack of knowledge in mental training and “The Geirs 11 Tool” may however offer an explanation to the freedom that the coaches experience when it comes to mental training, and the lack of structure around it. As the academy is measured and rewarded as part of the academy classification programme, depending on their ability to implement and follow up the mental training, the management may feel that they have to refer the coaches to the tool as they also lack the necessary knowledge on how to conduct mental training in other ways. The current results indicate that the coaches learning environment seems as such thwarted by a lack of basic knowledge with a culture of prioritising physique, technique and tactics, and muted of by a leadership that do not prioritize mental training, which perhaps due to the same lack of basic understanding, keeps this loop spinning.

Lack of structure may offer further challenges as people that engage in activities with a certain level of competence can thrive and be motivated without structure and plans to follow, but it can have the opposite effect if people feels that they lack the necessary competence (Harter, 1978). There are multiple things that leaders can do to solve such problems. Motivational factors that leaders can affect and need to consider are the

employees' individual characteristics. Leaders need to understand that their employees have different needs, attitudes and interests, and the leaders need to get to know these individual characteristics to understand what motivates the individual employee (Buble et al., 2014). Organizational characteristics and structure can have a big influence on employees' motivation (Buble et al., 2014; Hanafi et al., 2019). Knowing the organization characteristics, and having descriptions for how the organization runs, as well as job descriptions that gives the employee clarity of their responsibilities and guidance of how to solve their tasks can be a big motivational factor, especially when there is a lack of competence (Hanafi et al., 2019). The Aker academy coaches described a lack of such descriptions and structures. They felt that they may had too much freedom. Operating with freedom is not necessarily a bad thing. It suggests that they are not tied to deadlines and strict guidelines of how they should operate, which according to literature on motivation can lead to a high sense of self-determination and autonomy (Sherman and Smith, 1984; Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017).

There is, however, one more important factor that may need to be in place for employees to operate with such freedom and thrive and stay motivated. To thrive with such freedom, and reach optimal performances, there is a need for competence as well, according to motivation theories (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017; Harter, 1978). Given that this is not the case among the academy coaches regarding mental training, the motivational effect of autonomy will more or less be absent. This suggest that the academy could benefit from developing and implement a shared programme with frames and descriptions for how the coaches can apply sport psychology as part of their coaching practice. Implementing such a programme should not be a big challenge, as the coaches seemed motivated to include mental training in their practice.

Although pre-defined guidelines can be subversive for motivation, this is not always the case if there is a lack of competence in that area and a need for such documents to rely on (Hanafi et al., 2019; Buble et al., 2014). This would also make the academy more functional, and not to dependant on individuals. Changes in management and employees would not be as challenging, as they would have guidelines and structure to help them integrate (Bass and Bass, 2008; McMahan, 2007).

6.2.2 Lack of feedback and follow up concerning mental training

“It has been changes all the time, people have left and Englishmen and... so unfortunately it has been less of that in the last year and a half that what we want [follow-up and feedback from the management]”. C2.

“No, not that much really [feedback and follow up on mental training]. We may be asked about it [mental training] but it’s not... like I said it’s no standardised programme in the club so it’s difficult to push something that’s not standardised”. C3.

Lack of structure considering mental training seemed to be evident not only in activities that the coaches were responsible for. The coaches felt that there was a lack of feedback and follow up from the management considering mental training. A possible explanation to this is provided by the coaches themselves. They argued that there is no structure and routines of how to work on mental training in the academy, which make it difficult for the management to give feedback on those tasks. This is a challenge that lack of structure provides, especially when there is a lack of competence and knowledge among the people that are supposed to solve those tasks, as neither them nor the management know what should or could be carried out. Or could this be explained in a football context? Imagine that your players do not know what formation they are playing in, or what plan they have for a certain game. Their movement, communication and feedback would turn inefficient. According to Buble and colleagues (2014), the same goes for the workplace; having certain routines and guidelines can make the communication and feedback more logical.

If people feel that they are successful in their jobs and tasks that they view as optimal challenges, and if they are provided with support or feedback from their leaders, they will feel sense of competence (Harter, 1978). First of all, it seems like the Aker academy coaches did not view the task of mental training to be an optimal challenge, as they felt they lacked proper training, knowledge and competence. Secondly, the lack of feedback and follow up connected to mental training suggest that there is difficult to develop a higher sense of competence motivation amongst the coaches if they do not develop themselves through own initiatives. This can lead to negative consequences as anxiety and shame amongst the coaches. If individuals fail when attempting challenges that are considered optimal for them, or if there is a lack of feedback and reinforcement, the individuals will have a decreased

sense of competence motivation (Harter, 1978). Based on this train of thoughts, the academy coaches seem to need feedback and reinforcement to face the challenge of mental training as they do not possess the high level of competence needed to manage their role requirements sufficiently. This may, however, require a customized and shared structure for mental training within the academy, as a responsible action facilitated by the management. A prerequisite to make a proper structure, would be to increase level of knowledge of mental training in the management, or bring in an external source that are able to help the management to adapt it to the current context.

6.2.3 Lack of clarity of tools for mental training

The lack of structure, routines and methods are evident in the coaches' attitudes considering the lack of clarity of the use and purpose of the various mental training tools. The academy coaches discussed various tools that they felt had an effect on players' mentality in their practice. Interestingly, only one coach mentioned the use of a wellness questionnaire, that the players fill out every morning, and reporting RPE (Rating of Perceived Exertion) as fully integrated in daily workouts as a mean to develop the players discipline. Two of the coaches mentioned VR classes with integrated software to develop orientation skills as a tool for mental training in the academy. This gives the impression that it is unclear which tools in the academy that are considered as tools meant to develop mental skills, and whether it is a plan behind using tools for mental training at all. Some of the tools that were mentioned as mental training tools by some coaches, were not mentioned at all by others. It may be true that mental training goes on all the time, as one coach argued, but that would mean that all tools in the academy, and all training events would be considered mental training.

“I’m afraid that the form [Geirs 11 Tool] is being used as a “yeah, we have used it, now we have done mental training”. It’s not mental training, it’s a screening or what we call it”. C1.

All the coaches mentioned and discussed “The Geirs 11 Tool” as a tool for mental training. “The Geirs 11 Tool” is a tool that measures different mental skills that are needed to succeed as an athlete rather than a tool that offers methods of how to develop them. How to work on these skills seem to have been done from the coaches' experience. As the quote from C1 above expressed, the tool can be used as a screening of the players' mental skills, but the

coach did not believe that the tool itself is a good tool for mental training. This adds to the confusion of the mental training tools that the coaches talked about during the interviews. Developing the skills that are proposed in “The Geirs 11 Model” are argued to be required to become an elite athlete. As neither the model nor the tool attach any guidelines for practical use, it makes it less likely to be used unless the ability to read and translate data from the Geirs 11 screening as a source for applied coaching practice is present. Although this tool was reported as part of the academy routines, the access to competence seems crucial to integrate mental training in their work properly. The coaches also need to understand and buy into the concept to transfer it further to the players in a convincing way.

Academies participating in the classification does not have to implement the Geirs 11, but the NTFs suggested classification system, which is created from research on top academies in Europe, as well as high performance environments outside of football (Olafsen, 2017; 2019), may appeal to academy leaders. As “The Geirs 11 Model” is one of the elements used to evaluate how academies execute mental training, it can understandably be natural to implement the Geirs 11 into the mental training practices in academies. Nevertheless, if there is a lack of competence in mental training in the academy, the easiest way to keep NTF happy is to follow NTFs suggestion. However, implementing an external model may be challenging as it is not tailor-made to the Aker academy context and its inherent knowledge, experience, beliefs, and competence in mental training.

Another argument for following the suggested NTF model, is that coaches in academies operate in sectors which are characterized by limited time and traditions for physical-tactical training (Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013), which may make it difficult to adopt to for the coaches. Also, the coaches have not been included in the development of the existing tool, and hence might not feel much ownership to the tool and the routines that comes with it. This may affect the efficiency in the academy, as employees that feels a sense of ownership in their workplace tend to be more effective (Steiner, 1979). If involved, employees can sense a bigger feeling of autonomy as well (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Meaning, if the coaches had been involved in creating the tool and routines connected to mental training, they may have felt more ownership towards it and a bigger sense of autonomy as they had a say on their workday, making tasks considering mental training for efficient.

If the management lacks the required knowledge and competence on this model, and mental training in general, it can prevent them from making authentic decisions (Fusco, 2015). Decisions considering mental training might be “controlled” by the model, which is an issue as the model is not constructed after the Aker academy’s context. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge and competence in mental training (and the model) can affect the managements communication about the subject and the model, and the decisions connected to mental training (Herskedal, 2017). Having clear communication from the management can make the coaches believe in the project and see the importance of doing it, and likewise, communicating with confidence and knowledge can be important not only in the beginning of the implementation phase, but important to keep the academy on track when it comes to mental training. Developing knowledge and competence in mental training will also help the management make better decisions when it comes to what methods, structures, and plans to use for mental training. This can help the management to develop the academy further on areas that involve mental training. The selected approach to mental training requires creativity, knowledge, experience and competence to make the most out of its associated tool(s). After completing “The Geirs 11 Tool” by a player and a coach, it will merely give the coach a picture of how the player perceives his/her mental skillset, and how the coach perceives the players’ mental skills. The decision of which methods to use with the aim to develop those skills currently relies on the individual coach. The current approach is likely not optimal, as long as the mental training competence present is not perceived as sufficient among the academy coaches.

6.2.4 Mental training on and off the field

“I believe it is a lot to gain from performance enhancement training, but at the same time it is important that we start in the right end, we need to know who the player is, where we are, what is the identity of the player. I think we have a lot to gain from both [player and person], I don’t think it’s one or the other direction”. C1.

“It’s in the game they are going to perform, it is 11 vs 11 they need to be good, when they get older. So we have to try and improve them in the context they actually are going to be in. That’s what I’m thinking”. C2.

In addition to various tools, the coaches discussed how mental training can be executed on and off the field. Two of the Aker academy coaches mentioned visualization as a technique

that they already apply. Without going in depth on how, the coaches expressed their belief that this will help the players, confirming through their 5-10 minutes' visualization tasks that their players work on every day. Visualization is one of the most known mental skill training technique. Yet, visualization is a limiting term, and to get the most out of methods concerning visualization, imagery seems more suited. The difference between visualization and imagery, is that visualization is limited to just "see" their tasks in their minds, while imagery is multisensory (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016). Imagery seeks to activate as many senses as possible to make the training as realistic as possible. When an athlete is using imagery techniques, he/she are supposed to see the event, feel it, hear it, taste it, and smell it. If this technique is done right and as detailed as possible, imagery can have a similar effect as physical training (Munroe-Chandler and Hall, 2016). Therefore, if the Aker academy coaches want to get best possible results by using visualisation, they should rather use the broader term imagery and the detailed use of it. A suggested approach is the PETTLEP model, as this model sets out to activate all sensed through Physical images, in an accurate Environment, doing a defined Task, using realistic Timing, while knowing what they are supposed to Learn, with realistic Emotions, and a clear Perspective.

Further, all of the coaches discussed how they included mental training through drills and team/player conversations. They argued that the mental training should be performed in the context that the players should perform. In that sense, the Pyramid Model of Athletic Excellence (PMAE) could be a model for the Aker academy to be inspired by in their strive to develop mental skills that will improve performance. In line with "The Geirs 11 Model", the PMAE suggest that athletes need to develop psychological skills and adversity coping skills to reach optimal performance (Harmison and Casto, 2012; Aoyagi and Poczwardowski, 2016). This model suggests that goal-setting, imagery, and pre-performance routines can help athletes develop such skills. The model could inspire the Aker academy to implement various techniques that seems to develop various mental characteristics in "The Geirs 11 Model". As mentioned earlier, Orlick's (2008) Wheel of Excellence model is possibly another approach that the academy could fit well to the Aker academy context. This model uses different mental attributes as the most important characteristics to have to become an elite athlete. Techniques that are suggested by this model is visualization, focus development/distraction control, self-evaluation, self-talk, goal-setting, and self-regulation. By adopting this model, the academy would work on similar as well as different skills as compared to "The Geirs 11 Model". There are positives

and negatives to that if we keep the NTFs evaluation in mind. A general recommendation, however, in the phase of finding an appropriate approach to mental training, is to understand that there is a spectrum of possibilities, and through internal discussion and qualified guidance, it is possible to make united and anchored decisions of where and how to go.

Models and techniques are not necessarily the answer to all psychological dilemmas and challenges in the academies. Techniques can advantageously be combined with for example more traditional psychological approaches (Chase, 2011; Camiré and Trudel, 2013). Existential psychology, values to a greater extent the coach-player conversations, and have some methods that may help players focus on their identity (Nesti, 2004). Such conversations can help the coaches to show that they care about their players, and help players in their life outside football as well as inside football. Knowing who the player truly is can help both the coach and the athlete. From the coaches' side, they will know better how to deal with a player, which buttons to press, and when to back off. For players, it can help them be more self-aware, which can help them further develop their strengths and identifying weaknesses. More importantly for the player as a person however, is that an existential approach can help them deal with problems outside of the field, and make them more prepared to deal with challenges that may arise (Nesti, 2004).

6.2.5 Views on communication about mental training in the academy

“Yes, I would say that is the strength in the academy, it's a lot of informal conversations where we coaches discuss basically everything really, and we often talk about the mental part”. C4.

“It's not that much [discussion about mental training] at the main coaches table. There it is more football that is discussed”. C2.

The statements above from two of the academy coaches illustrates how the communication about mental training in the academy is not formally structured and prioritised. Some of the coaches argued that the topic of mental training is often brought up to discussion, but the discussions seems informal, and not always with all staff participating. One coach suggested that informal discussions where the coaches can talk about everything is a strength in the academy. This can of course be a good thing and a strength, as the Self-determination theory suggest that for a workplace to be efficient and an optimal work environment, there need to

be relations between the employees and between the employees and their superior (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, the coaches called for more structure on discussions about mental training and it is needed in the academy. Discussion about it can help them develop methods and routines when it comes to mental training as this can help the coaches exchange ideas which can improve competence in the academy and there will be more of a common tread in their work with mental training. Developing such routines and eventually methods to mental training can be motivating when there is a lack of knowledge and competence in a workplace (Hanafi et al., 2019).

Taking all factors discussed in Category two into consideration, one can argue that the academy is being led with a laissez-faire type of leadership when it comes to mental training (Bass and Bass, 2008). Similarly, as coaches tend to work on areas that they feel competent doing (physical, tactical, technical), leaders may also tend to focus more on subjects that they consider themselves competent in (Bass and Bass, 2008). Meaning, mental training may not have been prioritised because of the lack of perceived competence, and the leaders may have focused on tasks they felt more competent doing. To tackle this issue, a sport psychologist consultant could help the academy to critically customize an approach to mental training in an inductive manner by taking contextual consideration, as an alternative to the current deductive “one size fits all” approach as proposed centrally by the NTF. This can also raise the level of competence in the academy, leading to more discussions and more constructive feedback from the management.

6.3 Category three: Future of mental training in the academy

Category three considers the coaches’ attitudes considering mental training in the academy in the future. This category inheres two general dimensions, which is *external competence to develop and guide a standardised programme is desired*, and *the programme should be long-term and adapt to context*.

6.3.1 External competence to develop and guide a standardised programme is desired

“I think it can be a big advantage to have a standardised programme for how we develop players mentally. Then we have something to work from and what we should do, and it can be different from 14 to 16 to Molde 2 and to senior”. C2.

“No, we’re not prepared yet. We have to prepare. We could not have started right now. We need training and coursing and so”. C4.

All of the coaches expressed in some way or the other that they would welcome a standardised mental training programme that can guide and develop them. This seems to emphasize their feeling of lacking related knowledge and competence. By acknowledging that there is limited knowledge in the academy beyond football, they open a window for learning. As already mentioned, having a mental training programme can be motivating and helpful when there is a lack of competence and knowledge (Buble et al., 2014; Hanafi et al., 2019). Having methods and routines in place from such a programme can help the coaches implementing a common tread in their work in mental training. To develop such a programme however, offers challenges. As mentioned in Category two, the lack of knowledge and competence in mental training suggests that there is a need for external assistance. For the coaches, this may cause some issues, as according to research on autonomy and ownership in the workplace, the employees embrace plans and strategies more easily if they have been involved in developing them (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Kotter, 1996; Steiner, 1979). This suggest that the coaches should be included in the development of a mental training programme, at least parts of it.

Furthermore, after developing such a programme, the lack of knowledge in the academy can be a big challenge when implementing a mental training programme (Camiré and Trudel, 2013). If the coaches alone are responsible for implementing the programme, there may be problems as they may lack the needed knowledge about the programme, its methods and routines, and individual psychological differences that are evident in bigger groups, such as their academy teams. Halerman and colleagues (2020) even suggest that many coaches do not even know how to implement mental training as they lack the necessary knowledge and competence. If there is a lack of knowledge, it will affect their communication and trustworthiness about it (Herskedal, 2017), which can cause problems when implementing

the mental training programme as it may seem less attractive and less convincing. Receiving help from professionals can help the academy to good processes. Professionals can bring in their external competence, helping the management develop structure in mental training that fits their context, and help them “sell” it to the coaches (Chase, 2011), as well as training the academy to develop competence in mental training (Halerman et al., 2020). According to Camiré and Trudel (2013), empirical evidence suggest that coaches prefer to receive help or assistance from a professional consultant to learn and to implement mental training in their sport organization. Deciding on how to use such a consultant needs to be evaluated carefully though. Consultants can teach the coaches sport psychology and mental training so the coaches can conduct a mental training programme on their own. The issue with this approach however, is that workshops to teach coaches mental training will raise interest and motivation in the short term, but after a few weeks the interest might drop off if the learned techniques is not implemented in a structured programme (Michel, 2013). It may therefore be safer for the academy to invest in a consultant that can help them fully implement a programme with all techniques that should be used in a structured way.

One approach that may be worth looking at for the academy is the Sport Psychology Service Delivery model. This model gives a better understanding of how consultants can enter a sport organization, implement a mental training programme, and then conclude and terminate the work relationship (Poczwardowski and Sherman, 2011). Using such an approach will help the academy learn about the programme and the methods and techniques in it. This will eventually make them independent from having a sport psychology consultant in the academy, and they can run the mental training programme on their own. There are however challenges to recruit consultants and bring in external competence. One of the coaches argued that it is important that an external consultant is educated in sport psychology, and understand the football context. This is also in line with previous research on coaches’ attitudes towards sport psychology consultants. Freitas and colleagues (2013) argued that coaches prefer if consultants have sport related knowledge as it would make it easier to connect with them. Further, coaches also seem to want consultants that they can rely on and trust, as they lack the necessary knowledge about mental training (Freitas et al., 2013; Halerman et al., 2020). This will help the coaches being in the same page as the consultants, which is important, as they need to agree on methodology and overall goals of the mental training (Halerman et al., 2020). Taking these considerations, it seems like a

promising path to follow for the academy to hire an external consultant that can contribute to improve internal working relationship.

Other challenges that can arise with external assistance is resources, according to the coaches. This is also one of the most mentioned roadblock in literature when implementing a mental training programme (Smedley, 2013). Considering the overall goals of a football academy, time constrains and budget restrictions are highly relevant in this case. The academy ultimately wants to develop highly skilled football players, and with the limited time and money, mental training may not be prioritised. Limited resources are a main reason for why sport organizations do not engage in mental training and sport psychology, even though effects of engaging in it are favoured (Smedley, 2013). Creating an argument that supports the importance of mental training for the players personal and professional development may be helpful to gain more resources from the management.

6.3.2 The programme should be long term and adopt to context

“But it is as he said [sport psychologist], you can’t do much in an hour or two, it is a long term thing, but it was okay to get a wake-up call. But I think if we’re going to work on the mentality, then there is not just to set out two, three hours and say now we have done it, now we’re finished with it”. C1.

“You have to think thoroughly if you’re going to implement something that you’ve read, that are based on some subjective experience of another coach. We have to look after that when we’re developing our own program for mental training. That it is suited our context and that it is based on objectivity and not subjective experiences”. C2.

Some of the coaches argued that the implementation of the mental training should be long-term, and the academy should take step by step with mental training. It might take time for the coaches and the players to learn about mental training, as coaches and players often do not know too much about mental training and what to expect from mental skills training (Chase, 2011). Implementing mental training over a longer period, and implementing techniques, methods and routines over time can help the players and coaches learn about mental training and straighten their expectations and beliefs.

Assuming that the academy will eventually have the right competence in place, and are ready to develop a programme, the coaches had some concerns and opinions of what the programme need to consider. They argued that the programme need to be adapted to their context. There are multiple programmes and models that the Aker academy can adopt and use, such as the 5C coaching efficacy programme, The Wheel of Excellence, or the Pyramid Model of Athletic Excellence, but as C2 claims in the quote above, they cannot just rely on what has work for other coaches at other places. They should develop a programme that suits the Aker academy's context and daily operations. Previous research on the topic suggest that coaches want sport psychology services to be available based on the necessity and on the unique schedule of football (Halerman et al., 2020). This seems to be relevant for the Aker academy coaches as well, as they lack the knowledge and competence to conduct such services on their own. For a mental training programme to be successful, the coaches need assistance from either sport psychology services or consultants that are available when the academy needs it. The coaches argued that they have limited time with their players and traditionally, physical and tactical training has been prioritised as they cannot priorities everything. This is also evident in previous research, as youth coaches report that they have limited time with their players (Smedley, 2013). However, they argued that mental training is important for players' development, which is true according to previous research, as having a mental training programme can help players grow personally and can provide them with mental toughness that they need to make it in their sport (Camiré and Trudel, 2013). This is why it may be important for the coaches to push forward and develop a programme, but as they argued, it is difficult to priorities everything. They argued that it can be important for the Aker academy to implement mental training into the daily operations.

All coaches expressed that a lot of mental training can be made during the training sessions by focusing a little extra on the mental part and constructing sessions and exercises that has some mental aspects to them. This is in line with the mentioned models above (Harmison and Casto, 2012; Orlick, 2008; Harwood, 2008), and is something that the NTF suggest that academies can do (Olafsen, 2019). If the coaches are trained in mental training, they will be better suited to identify which mental skills they can implement and train in different football sessions. A few of the coaches discussed how they can work on handling adversity by having one team start a game down 2-0. This is a good example of how they can merge mental training into football sessions. Developing other methods to implement mental training may

require assistance from a consultant, as psychological mechanisms can be complicated, and it can be difficult to create drills that work mental skills.

6.3.3 Programme needs to take players total load and individual characteristics into consideration

Family, friends, and school are some of the most common time constraints outside of football that the players need to have time for. Therefore, a mental training programme cannot take too much additional time from the players. Such non-football activities are often mentioned as a roadblock to implement mental training programmes in sport organizations (Halerman et al., 2020). Especially school can be demanding and take much time in a player's day, as the school as well as the football team has certain expectations from the player. The Aker academy has to be careful when implementing a mental training programme, as too many expectations for players can lead to mental health issues such as unhealthy anxiety and depression (Halerman et al., 2020). Implementing mental training mostly into the daily football sessions, like the coaches discussed can help prevent this, as it would not put too much additional pressure and expectations to the player. Further, the coaches argued that the programme should take players age into consideration. This may be a good point, as players in different age groups have different mental abilities, and what they can comprehend of mental skills training will be different. The older players should have developed further mentally than the younger (normally), and are more prepared to learn different mental skills and understanding mental training. Constructing the programme in a way that introduce both new skills and duration of mental training based on age groups seems like the wanted option by the academy coaches.

Taking the individual player differentiations into considerations is suggested to be important by the academy coaches. As with physical and technical training, players may need to improve different mental skills. Getting to know their players' personality and current mental abilities will be important to know what mental skills they need to work on. Harmison and Casto (2012) suggests in their Pyramid Model of Excellence that in the first step in mental training the coaches need to get to know their athletes' personality, motivational orientations and philosophical beliefs. This is the players' foundational attributes, and what psychological skills and adversity coping skills the players should work on needs to be decided from these attributes (Harmison and Casto, 2012). The Aker academy coaches

previously argued that they often have one-to-one conversations with the players. Focusing on the players' personality, their motivation and beliefs during some of the conversations can help the coaches identify what skills the players need to work on. This can also help the players form their true identity, which will help them act more authentic (Nesti, 2004). Further, "The Geirs 11 Tool" is argued to be a screening of the players' current mental skills by one of the coaches. Using "The Geirs 11 Tool" can therefore be used as a tool for screening, and not be referred to as the mental training that goes on in the academy. This tool can help coaches identify what skills players need to work on, and choosing what methods and ways to improve these skills will be the next step.

Lastly, the programme must take the coaches differentiations into consideration. The coaches argued that they are different, have different skills, and priorities differently when it comes to training methods. The fact that the coaches are different should not be a problem as all people are different, but the fact that they have different skills and priorities on the field should be taken into consideration when developing a mental training programme. Handling such employee differentiations is one of the most important tasks for a leader (Buble et al., 2014). Initiatives to develop competence in mental training seems to be a need that the leader has to address. They have already had two coaches on a mental training course, but they have not implemented a lot of it yet. This suggest that they all need to be educated on the subject to have a bigger chance of implementing it, as lack of knowledge is one of the biggest roadblocks to implement mental training (Freitas et al., 2013; Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel 2013; Smedley, 2013; Gould and Damarjian, 1998). From a leadership point of view, depending too much on some individuals in the organization can make them vulnerable to change of staff (Bass and Bass, 2008; McMahon, 2007). Of course it is difficult to make all employees equally skilled at everything, but having an organizational structure, and providing the employees with the training they need will make the organization more prepared for changes in staff (McMahon, 2007; Hanafi et al., 2019; Buble et al., 2014). The main point with the training and organizational structure however, is to develop and guide the coaches. As they at the moment lack knowledge and competence in mental training, such initiatives can be motivating for the coaches, as they will further develop themselves and have plans and guides to rely on in these difficult and complex tasks (Hanafi et al., 2019). Implementing such changes and structures can take time, and developing competence among the academy coaches is also time demanding, which suggest that this is a long term-project for the Aker academy.

7.0 Conclusion

The current study set out to explore which attitudes the Aker academy coaches possess towards mental training and their associated routines. To do so, four coaches from the Aker academy shared their related thoughts and stories. Mental training and sport psychology has traditionally not been perceived as too relevant in football (Halerman et al., 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Nesti, 2010), although it is considered as highly relevant in professional sports (Olafsen, 2017, 2019; Halerman et al., 2020). Despite these cultural based trends, the current study revealed a curiosity, positive attitudes, and ideas of how to apply mental training, among the academy coaches. Yet, they acknowledged a lack of competence in this field and called for more thoroughly developed and managed structures and routines which could unify their work, form of expression and establish evaluable practices.

Taking the Aker academy's context into consideration, the past few years have been challenging in various ways. Managerial changes internally to the academy combined with demands from the NTF have likely had an impact on the academy's operations. Based on the lack of competence, and lack of priority of mental training in the academy (prior to this study), the current mental training approach is based on externally developed competence that is not tailor-made for the Aker academy's context. This may have had a negative impact on the leadership concerning mental training (Fusco, 2015; Herskedal, 2017), which again might have had a negative impact on the coaches' motivation to follow the routines (Harter, 1978; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Lack of ownership to the existing methods and routines, as well as lack of knowledge and competence in mental training may have led to an inefficient approach to mental training in the Aker academy. The call to the management, as responsible for constructing internal structures and routines, is that initiatives that challenge and guide their coaches can motivate as long as lack of competence to conduct mental training on their own is the case (Buble et al., 2014; Hanafi et al., 2019).

The management's attitudes towards mental training now seem to be positive, as the academy wants to develop a mental training programme. However, there is a need for training and coursing in mental training for the academy, as well as external help from a sport psychology consultant to develop and implement a new programme that suits the academy's context, in terms of their individual characteristics, their demographical characteristics, club structure, as well as their cultural views. If the Aker academy in

collaboration with a sport psychology consultant manage to construct a standardised programme for mental training, which supports the coaches' holistic views to mental training with a mixture of performance enhancement techniques and existential psychology, they may have a good chance to develop players that can handle adversity and prosperity, as well as authentic persons that know their identity that may be more prepare to handle challenges that life throws at them (Chase, 2011; Nesti, 2010; Halerman et al., 2020).

8.0 Limitations and future research

The discussed findings in this study can only be argued to be certain for the Aker academy, and the attitudes discussed does not necessarily apply to other football academies. However, they seem relevant for other academies, as many of the findings are similar to previous findings on coaches' attitudes on mental training, and could be analysed from existing literature. This suggest that other sport organizations cannot expect or assume that their coaches share these attitudes for certain, but the discussed findings can give such organizations a picture of what attitudes they need to identify and consider when developing or implementing mental training.

The coaches' attitudes towards mental training could have been affected by different factors. Mental training is something the academy leader prior to this study expressed that he wanted to improve in the academy. This could affect the coaches' statements as they may want to seem interested and view it as important to satisfy the leader. As the coaches argued during the interviews that they normally discussed mental training between them, and seemed to be genuinely interested, this seem rather unlikely. The fact that I worked there as an intern during the data collection could also have affect the answers from the coaches in different ways. This also seem unlikely as they were informed that this could benefit their tasks considering mental training. The coaches direct and critical answers to the questions in the interviews indicates that the answers are trustworthy and gives little reasons for doubt. It is however important to keep in mind that mentioned factors could have affected some of the answers.

Based on the findings and this study's limitations, it would be interesting to see similar investigations in other football academies, and different sport organizations. Further research on coaches' attitudes can verify such findings, or identify differences in other organizations. It would be interesting and relevant to see what affects other coaches' attitudes towards mental training, and identify or develop best practice of leadership, organizational structure, and coaches' education in their sport. Studies on coaches' views on NTF's academy classification system would also be interesting and relevant, as coaches are highly affected by the changes proposed by it. This may affect how leaders lead coaches that feels they lack competence in different tasks including mental training. It can also affect the lack of focus in mental training in football education, as both coaches and organizations view mental training as important.

9.0 References

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10.0 Appendices

10.1 Interview guide

1. Introduksjon og bakgrunn (Martin et al., 2012; Smedley, 2013; Michel, 2013)

- Intervjuets hensikt, viktighet og struktur (tidsbruk, anonymitet, bruk av data)
- Bakgrunnsinformasjon om respondenten (utdanning, kurs, arbeidserfaring)
 - o Nåværende rolle, varighet, veien dit, tidligere roller?
 - o Hvor lenge har du vært i Aker akademiet? Hvordan var veien hit? Alder?
- Hva liker du ved å være trener, hva motiverer deg? (indre, ytre)

2. Personlige meninger om mental trening / sport psykologi (Martin et al., 2012; Halerman et al., 2020):

- Hvilke erfaringer har du med mental trening / sports psykologi fra før?
- Er mental trening noe du interesserer deg for?
 - o Hvorfor? På hvilken måte?
 - o Hvordan har din bakgrunn påvirket dette?
- Hva betyr mental trening og sport psykologi for deg?
 - o Viktige egenskaper? Hvorfor?
 - o Treningsmetoder, utviklingsmetoder?
 - o Hva bør fokuset være med mental trening / sport psykologi? Hvorfor?
- Hva er dine tanker om å strukturere mental trening (mentalt treningsprogram)
 - o Fordeler / ulemper?
 - o utfordringer / muligheter?

3. Mentalt trenings program i Aker akademiet (Harter, 1978; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Kotter, 1996)

- Hvordan jobber dere med den mentale biten hos spillerne?
 - o Når startet det?
 - o Bakgrunnen for at det ble innført?
 - o Hvordan er strukturen/verktøy?
 - o Hvem har ansvar for å følge opp (eks. Rutiner? Hvem "eier" prosjektet?
 - o Hvordan merker du (trenerne) oppfølgingen? Involvering?
 - o Hvordan merker spillerne oppfølgingen? Involvering?

- Hvilke tiltak benyttes? (Teknikker, metoder, lag møter, individuelle spillersamtaler)

4. Eget syn på programmet (Harter, 1978; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Camiré and Trudel, 2013; Freitas et al., 2013; Chase, 2011; Kotter, 1996)

- Hvorfor tror du Aker akademiet har valgt denne inngangen til mental trening?
 - Fører det til forbedringer blant spillerne? Har spillerne sagt noe?
 - Kunne du tenkt deg å endre på noe?
 - Hvordan? Hvorfor?
 - Hvilke diskusjoner går internt? (justeringer, forbedringer, etc.)
 - Hva er målet / målene med den mentale treningen?
 - Fokuset: Prestasjonsfremmende vs. Wellbeing? (velvære, trivsel)
- Hvordan opplever du å følge det eksisterende opplegget? (Geirs 11)
 - Vanskelig å forstå? Enkelt å forstå? Hvorfor, hvordan?
 - Opplæring, veiledning?
 - Hva leder det til (motiverende/demotiverende)? Hvorfor, hvordan?
 - Hvordan opplever du feedback på ditt arbeid med å bruke verktøyet?
 - Tilstrekkelig? Støttende? (Motiverende/demotiverende)

5. Akademiets syn på programmet (Harter, 1978; Ryan and Deci, 2000)

- Hvor god kompetanse føler du det er i akademiet på dette området?
 - Opplever du et ønske i akademiet om å utvikle seg på dette området? Hvordan?
 - Gjør du eller dine kolleger noe på egenhånd for å lære mer om dette temaet? Hvorfor / hvorfor ikke? Hva? Egeninitiert, eller på oppfordring fra arbeidsgiver?
 - Gjør akademiet / ledelsen noe for at dere skal lære mer om temaet? Hva?
 - Er mental trening / sport psykologi et tema dere trenere diskuterer med engasjement? Eksempler?

6. Veien videre – utvikling av programmet (Harter, 1978; Halerman et al, 2020; Camiré and Trudel, 2013)

- Hva er veien videre for det mentale treningsprogrammet?

- Hva er bakgrunnen for det?
- Er teamet enige? Hvorfor, hvorfor ikke?
- Er akademiet forberedt (tilstrekkelig kompetent) på dette området? Hvordan oppleves/føles det?
- Er du forberedt (tilstrekkelig kompetent)? Hvordan oppleves/føles det?
- Hvem bør være involvert i utviklingen av programmet? Hvorfor?
 - Intern prosess vs. Hjelp utenfra
- Hvem bør følge opp det det mental treningsprogrammet? Hvorfor?
 - Trener vs. Konsulent/ekspert

7. Avslutning

- Evt. tilføyelser eller annet som kan være relevant/aktuelt for sammenhengen?
- Takke for intervjuet, tilby å sende over resultatene når oppgaven er ferdig.

10.2 Consent form

Høgskolen i Molde Samtykkeskjema

Tittel på prosjektet:

“Which attitudes do Molde FK academy coaches possess towards mental training and their routines for mental training?”

Vennligst kryss av i ruten ved siden av sitatene dersom de stemmer.

1. Jeg bekrefter at jeg har lest og forstått informasjonen som er gitt ved prosjektet. Jeg har hatt mulighet til å vurdere informasjonen, stilt spørsmål og har fått svar på disse.

2. Jeg forstår at min deltakelse er frivillig og jeg kan trekke meg når jeg vil, om jeg vil, uten å oppgi en grunn.

3. Jeg forstår at all personlig data som blir samlet inn under intervjuet, og som vil bli benyttet i oppgaven, vil bli anonymisert og oppholdt konfidensielt.

4. Jeg forstår at det er en sjanse for jeg kan bli gjenkjent gjennom sitater om holdninger og meninger til mental trening, selv om sitatene blir anonymisert.

5. Jeg godtar å ta del i dette prosjektet.

6. Jeg forstår at det vil bli gjort lydopptak av intervjuet som lagres sikkert ved Høgskolen i Molde fram til oppgaven er godkjent.

7. Jeg forstår at sitater fra lydopptakene kan bli benyttet i fremtidige publikasjoner eller presentasjoner, men at sitatene vil forbli anonymisert.

Navn på deltaker

Dato

Underskrift

Navn på student
Mathias Svalestad

Dato
07.05.20

Underskrift
M. Svalestad