SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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1. SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

Coaching legend and current head of Global Football Development at FIFA, Arsène Wenger, states,

"Success in football is not only dependent on talent but on the ability to ***work together with others.****"*

Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009) emphasize in their research the need for holistic coaching that includes social and emotional development. We agree and believe that every coach can benefit from understanding how to support players holistically. Helping players better manage themselves facilitates their physical and technical development, while learning to collaborate effectively with others enhances their tactical performance. If all coaches acquire this knowledge and include explicit training in emotional and social competencies, more athletes will reach their full potential. Beyond improving on-field performance, these competencies can also be consciously applied in school, family life, personal relationships, and professional careers, thereby positively impacting society.

1.1. Social competencies in football

National team coach of England, Thomas Tuchel, states that

"Social competence in football is as important as technical abilities: without team spirit and mutual respect, ***you can't be successful.****"*

The most evident and thoroughly researched social competencies in football are communication and leadership. Worldwide, a substantial body of research has been conducted to prove the impact of those competencies, at both the player and coach levels. We have translated these findings into well-structured learning objectives to promote those competencies from an early age in youth football. In the field of sport, research on the other three social competencies we focus on—conflict management, trust, and compassion—remains limited.

1.2. The importance of deliberate development of social competencies

We believe that all factors that influence on-field performance should be explicitly taught. In traditional coaching education, coaches primarily learn how to promote physical skills, technical abilities, and tactics. Beyond understanding tactical principles and ideas from their coaches, players need to collaborate and understand one another to be successful.

Social competencies provide the foundation for improving team tactical performance and fostering strong social cohesion within a group. Team performance and social cohesion are strongly correlated. We believe that all emotional and social competencies significantly impact the outcome of the game, and explicit training of these competencies leads to better individual and team performance.

Promoting social and emotional competencies also provides professional clubs with an opportunity to support the majority of players in their youth academies who will not reach the professional level. By deliberately developing these competencies, clubs equip young athletes with skills that can be transferred to all other areas of life—family, relationships, academic pathways, and future careers.

1.3. Challenges in the development of social competencies in football

The reality in the football world often looks different. Many coaches and clubs are predominantly outcome-oriented, and success is measured by results such as wins, rankings, or measurable physical abilities. This leads to an overemphasis on physical and technical attributes.

Social competencies like empathy and communication are difficult to quantify, especially compared with physical metrics (speed, strength, etc.). Because they are more challenging, the definition and assessment of these competencies are less appealing to clubs and teams.

Another major factor is the culture of elite sports. Young players look at professional players as role models, and their behaviour from a social perspective often does not set the example it should. Greed, arrogance, and disrespectful behaviour toward referees and opponents appear frequently.

Toughness, aggression, and competitiveness are often prioritized over collaboration, emotional awareness, or conflict resolution. This can limit the development or recognition of social competencies in the elite sports environment.

The lack of recognition is further influenced by the stereotype that social competencies are “soft” or feminine qualities, which may reduce their perceived value in male-dominated or macho sporting cultures. Coaching education worldwide does not incorporate social and emotional competencies into the curriculum. The pedagogical and psychological content is very limited and insufficient to promote these competencies in a structured way.

Empathy and compassion, better skills in dealing with conflicts, and developing trust are still in their infancy in sports psychology research. Even the two intensively researched social competencies, leadership and communication, are not taught in a sufficiently structured way to coaches. This is why we have intensively researched these competencies and started offering coaching courses specifically focused on their development to fill that gap.

1.4. Social competencies and the Sharing Goals approach

Our story as an organization is deeply rooted in Africa. One example comes from a coaching course in South Africa. During a discussion about solidarity with local coaches, one of the coaches compared it to a core value from his childhood in a rural area—Ubuntu. People in his community would always help one another when someone needed support. Ubuntu—an African life philosophy—is deeply rooted in many communities, reflecting a culture of genuine care for others.

At that moment, we at Football for Worldwide Unity realized that this aligned fully with our organization's mission. We want to help coaches and children around the world to have the best experience possible in sports. This bond between all human beings drives us. We care about our global community, and sports is our way to connect with other human beings from other parts of the world. We use the power of our beloved team sport, football, to connect with people worldwide and reduce inequalities by offering free coaching education. South Africa was the starting point of our organization, where inequalities are significant. Money, power, and opportunities are often distributed to benefit only a small percentage of the population. Such inequalities often result in poverty, hunger, and crime. Through our holistic coaching approach, we aim to help coaches harness the power of football and enable groups to achieve their best. Social competencies are essential for strengthening bonds between people, both in sports and in everyday life.

To share another story from our over 15 years of experience, let us turn to Mozambique, one of our project countries. Several years ago, we began supporting the women's empowerment organization, Futebol dá Força—Football gives strength! We have been involved in their initial phase and continue to work closely with them. Together, we educate coaches who aim to impact young women, helping them improve their lives and strengthen their role in society.

Some years ago in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, a husband prohibited his wife from continuing to play football, insisting that she remains at home to takecare of the children and the household. After several weeks of her absence, the entire women's team gathered at her home to convince her husband to allow her to return to the team. Overwhelmed by the number of women, and their words explaining his wife's importance to the group, the husband agreed to let her rejoin the team.

This was an incredibly rewarding situation for everyone, as it demonstrates the power of a united group, and how to handle conflict collaboratively. It also illustrates how social competencies are interconnected and mutually supportive. The players demonstrated empathy and compassion for their absent teammate during the conflict. One woman took the lead as spokesperson, using her communication skills to persuade the husband of his wife's importance to the team. This situation also helped develop trust among the team members, as they demonstrated that they could rely on one another. All social competencies were applied in a coordinated way, positively shaping the team's cohesion and future interactions.

Social competencies do not exist in isolation. They interact, reinforce one another, and reach their full potential when developed together. Communication strengthens trust, which in turn enables constructive conflict resolution. Conflict management requires empathy, and leadership relies on all of these competencies. When deliberately cultivated, these competencies foster environments where both individual excellence and collective performance can thrive. Beyond the football field, these competencies guide how individuals contribute to their families, communities, and society at large.