1.1 Optimizing training and player structures

Introduction

Optimizing training seeks the simultaneous integration of all the athlete's structures in each exercise carried out. This is only possible to work on while on the playing field, as it is the game itself that allows the optimization of the player in a competitive context.

In the next point, a practical approach will illustrate exercises that involve the structures and values with which the club works. At all times, exercises must include values in parallel with technical and tactical issues.

The following structures interact in human beings:

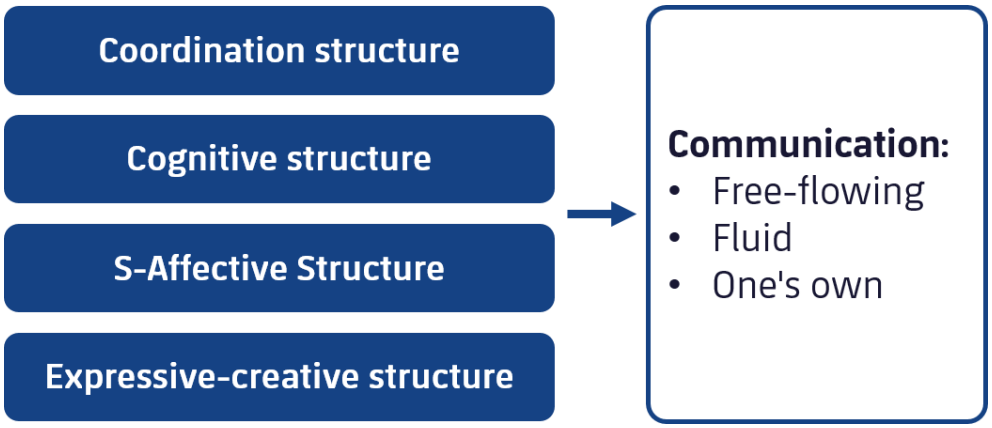
Table 1: Structures

Bioenergetic structure	Provides energy to live
Conditional structure	Represents physical capabilities
Coordination structure	Supports technique
Cognitive structure	Knowledge of the game environment
Socio-affective structure	Interpersonal relationships
Emotional-volitional structure	Emotions and desires
Expressive-creative structure	Individual and team communication signals
Mental structure	Understand and interpret what you want for the present and the future

Source: Seirul·lo, 2017.

Each one of the structures that will be seen in the following example favors the development of communicative channels. As mentioned above, in each of the exercises, in addition to tactical technical objectives, players must work on the values that represent the club, which include, among others, the philosophy of the game and the player, so the training must tend to be personalized.

Figure 1. Practical examples.



Source: Prepared by the authors.

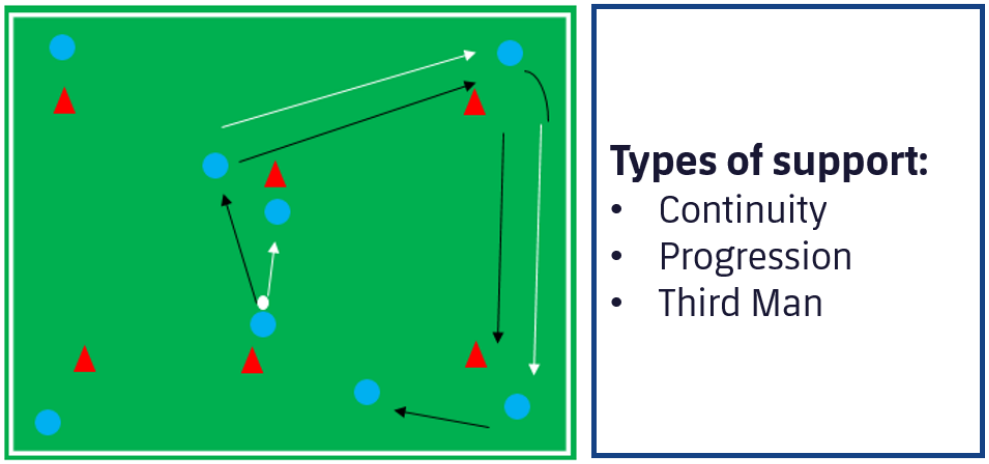
Exercises are developed to identify the union between:

- The different types of controls.
- The various trajectories with and without the ball.
- Intercommunication distances.
- The different body and gesture orientations.
- This is carried out using:
    - Games situation exercises: (6+1) on 3, (4+3) on 4.
    - Games: in the **possession** stage, the **communication** between the player who possesses the ball and the receiver is encouraged. In the **recovery** stage, the reference point is the player who is in the intervention zone.

Examples:

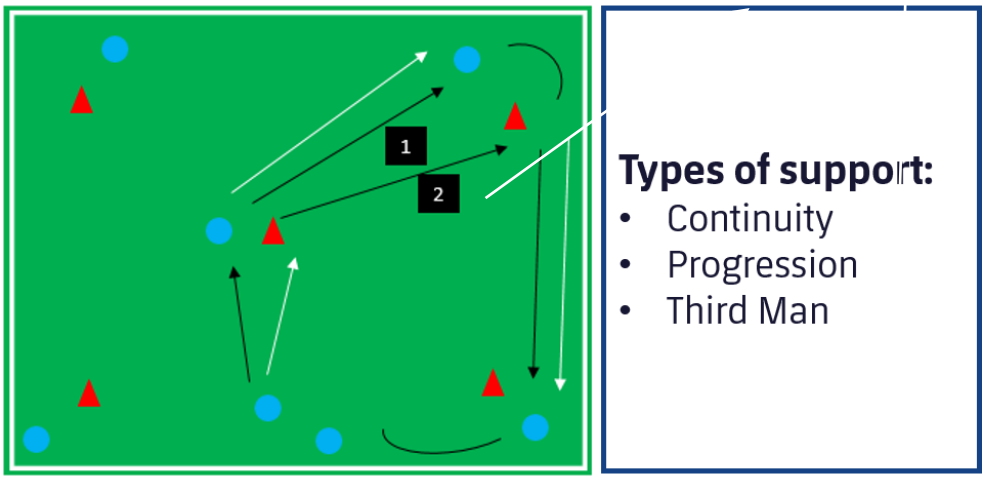
Passing, control and supporting exercises that work on the integration of the structures and the link with values such as communication and expressiveness.

Figure 2. Practical examples



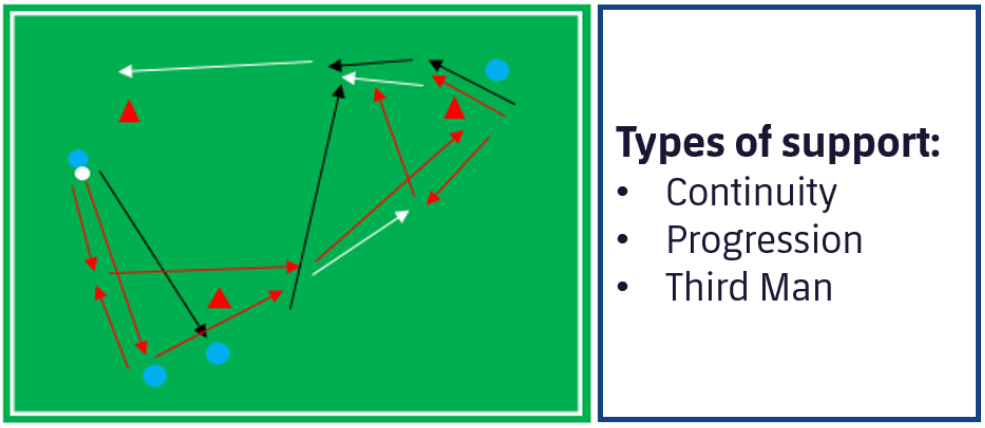
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 3. Practical examples



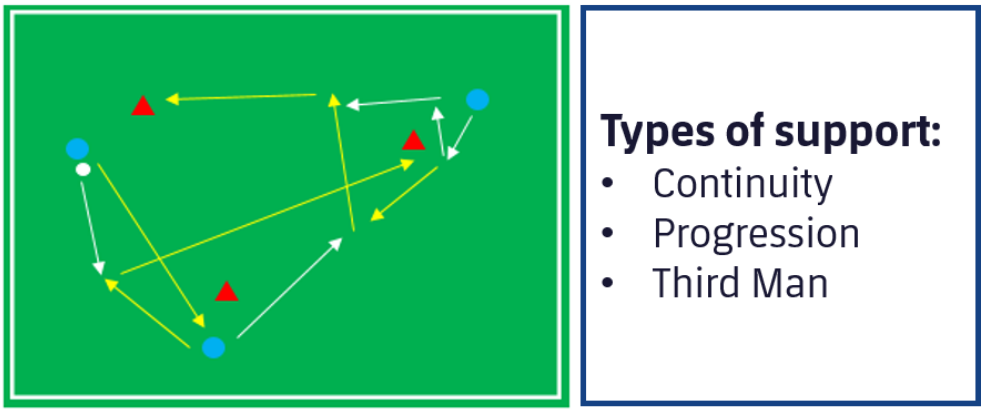
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 4. Examples



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 5. Examples

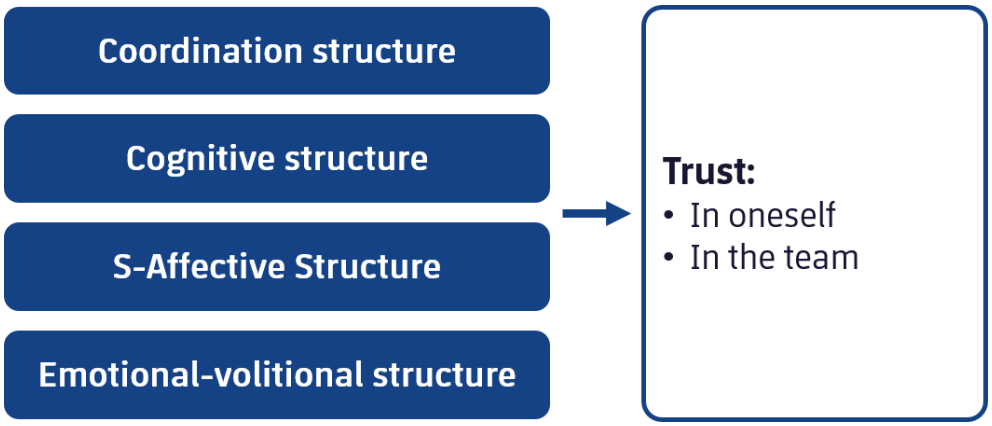


Source: Prepared by the authors.

In all of these examples, the focus will be on how the pass is made, what movements and gestures the players make before and after the pass is made or received, and why the pass is made. Intrinsically, we develop the capacity for interpersonal communication through the actions of the game; at the same time, we encourage the expressiveness of the players, since each one will express what he wants to communicate or achieve with the actions he carries out with a different gesture. It is the added value of the exercises that, otherwise, would be just a simple control and pass.

In the following case, we see how in different exercises we combine the work on structures with a value such as trust.

Figure 6. Practical examples



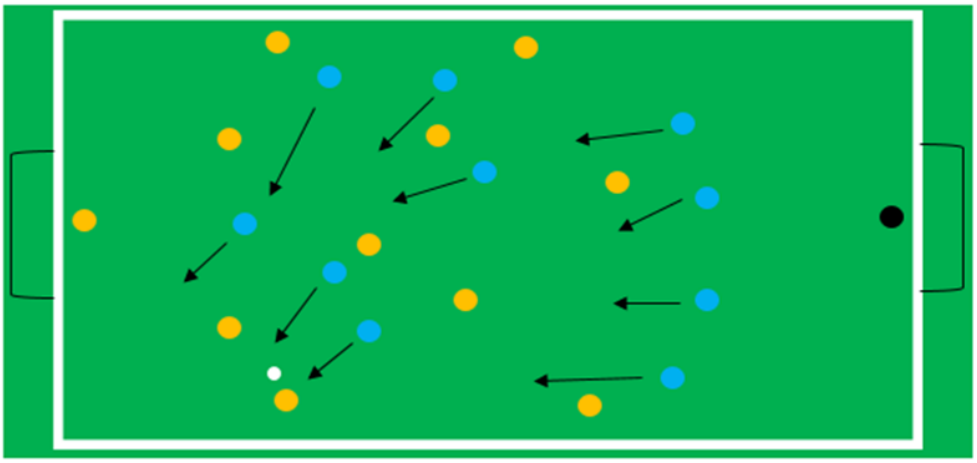
Source: Prepared by the authors.

This can be trained by creating:

Situations of 1 on 1:

- In the possession stage: dribbling.
- In the recovery stage: entry.
- Recovery of the ball after it's lost:
    - The trust in the team to be superior in the recovery stage in order to get the ball.

Figure 7. Practical examples

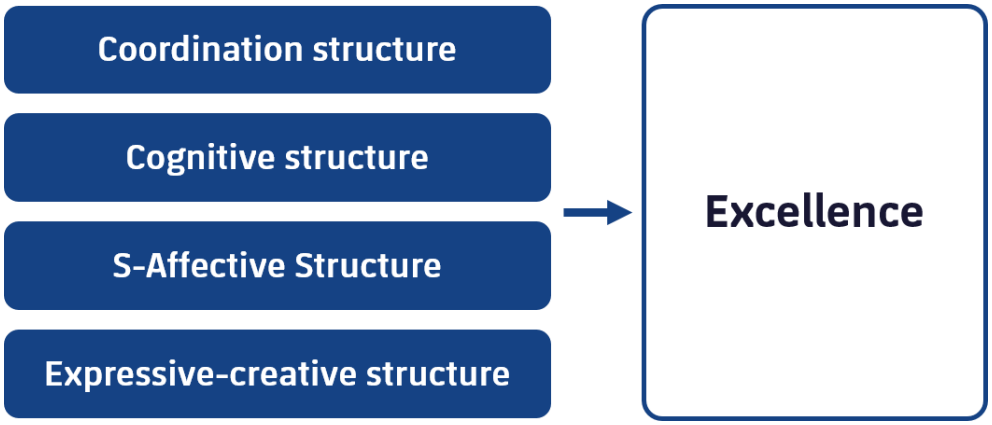


Source: Prepared by the authors.

Once again, the differentiating factor of this exercise is the emotional-volitional approach. It will be important how and when pressure is applied after the loss, but it will be more important to generate or optimize the desire for immediate recovery of the ball (emotional-volitional structure), and communication for the proper placement of each player and maintenance of interpersonal distances between teammates (socio-affective structure) to successfully apply such pressure.

In the next case, the structures are developed on the value of excellence.

Figure 8. Practical examples



Source: Prepared by the authors.

We must work with personal commitment and according to the conditions indicated by the coach, since it is understood that these are qualitative approaches that will be maintained indefinitely: the ball and playing excellence.

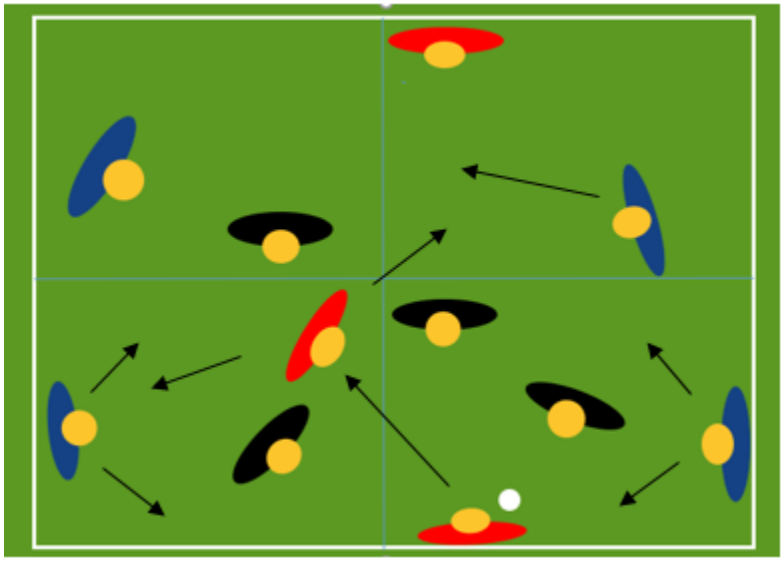
The development of excellence is carried out through position and game situation exercises:

- 4 on 4 + 3 with wildcards.
- The objective is to dominate the game by possessing the ball.
- Support your teammate, generate superior solutions and play as you want.

Mastery of the game is only generated by the possession of the ball, the team achieves excellence insofar as it is responsible for generating play. When one teammate has the ball, everyone else works to provide superior solutions. The player must not settle for passing the ball to any teammate who's open. He/she must make the best pass, to the best

teammate and in the best conditions. In this way the team and the teammate are not compromised.

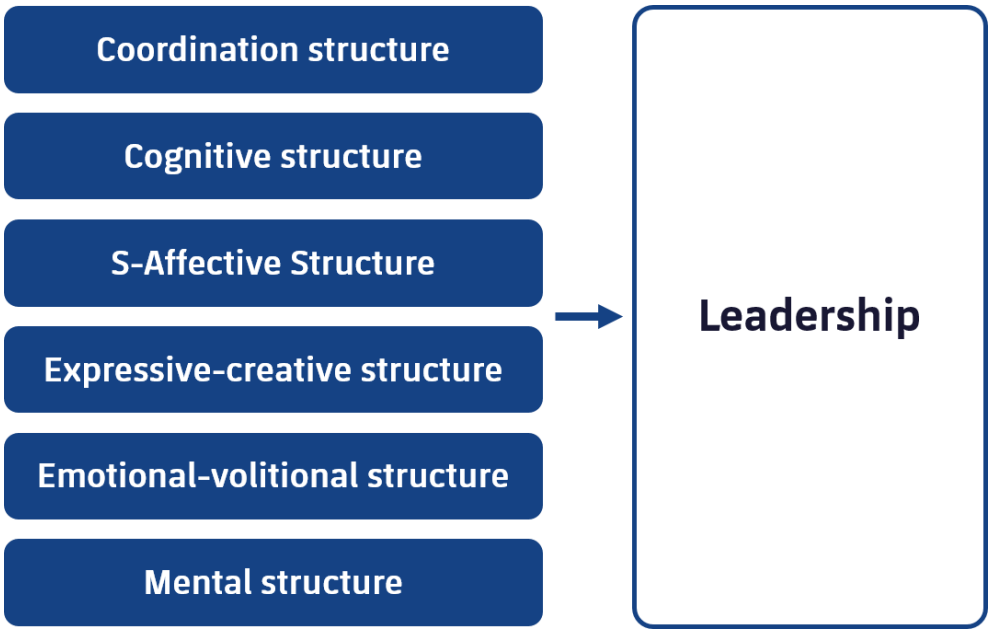
Figure 9. Practical example



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Player structures and their link to leadership.

Figure 10. Practical examples



Source: Prepared by the authors.

In this case, game situation exercises and actual games are used as a working approach for leadership development in combination with the above structures. Leadership is fundamental for a team to function, it can be 1, 2 or 3 players, as long as a different variable is contributed to the group.

Leadership during the game and on the playing field must never be commanded by the coach. It is the responsibility of the player, who has grown throughout his training process with the ideas of leadership and has been trained as such. Not with the idea of being a passive and introverted complement, but, rather, of being extroverted, of speaking and communicating permanently.

Game situation exercises:

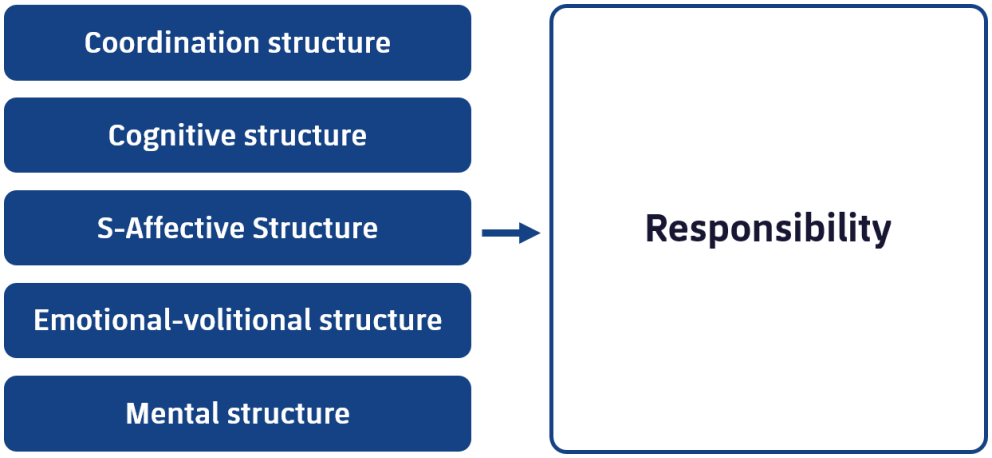
- The wild cards are responsible for exercising leadership during game situation exercises, to dominate the game with possession of the ball.

Games:

- One example of leadership style is that of Carles Puyol, a reference point for the first team, who guides and keeps the team united as the game evolves.

The case study used is referenced in Figure 10. Player structures and their link to responsibility.

Figure 11. Case Studies

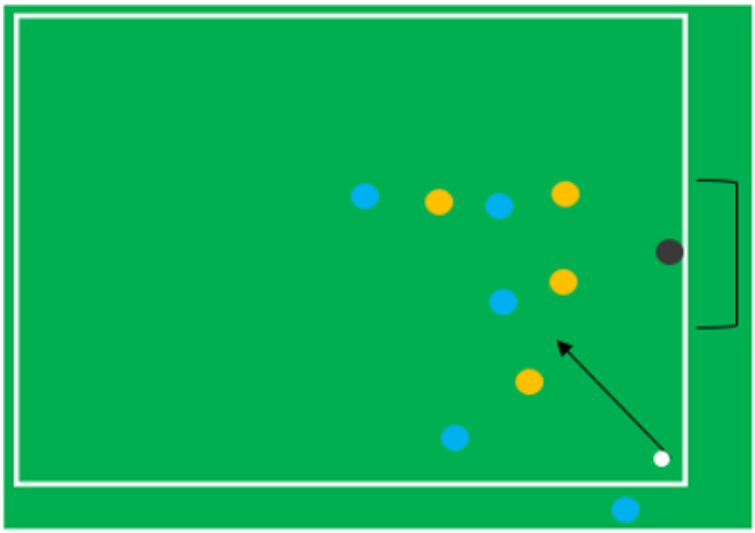


Source: Prepared by the authors.

The approach for training responsibility in combination with the structures is developed and strengthened during the recovery stage, when the commitment of all the players on the team is required.

- It is important focus on covering your opponent in playing areas of high risk, using the tactical approaches of defensive strategies. Example: with a corner kick.

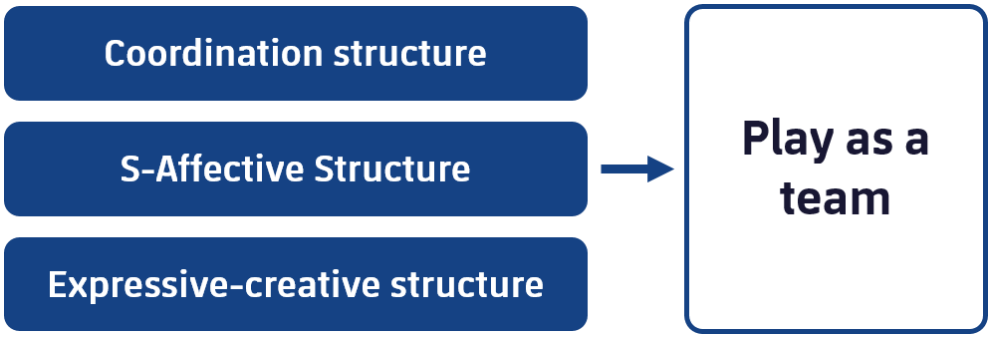
Figure 12. Practical examples



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Player structures and their link with the development of the team game.

Figure 13. Practical examples



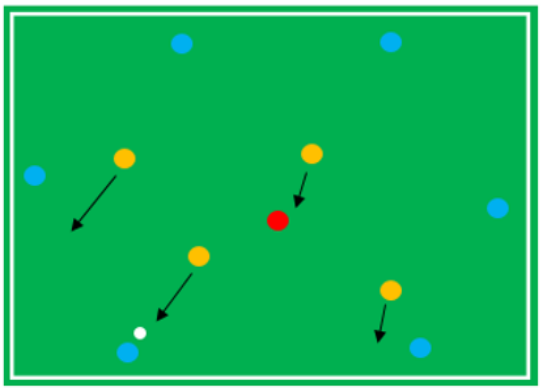
Source: Prepared by the authors.

During the recovery stage:

- In the areas of intervention, mutual assistance and cooperation, they work to recover the ball.

- Whenever you work on game situation exercises, whether it's possession of the ball, support or distribution on the playing field to achieve the desired excellence and approach.

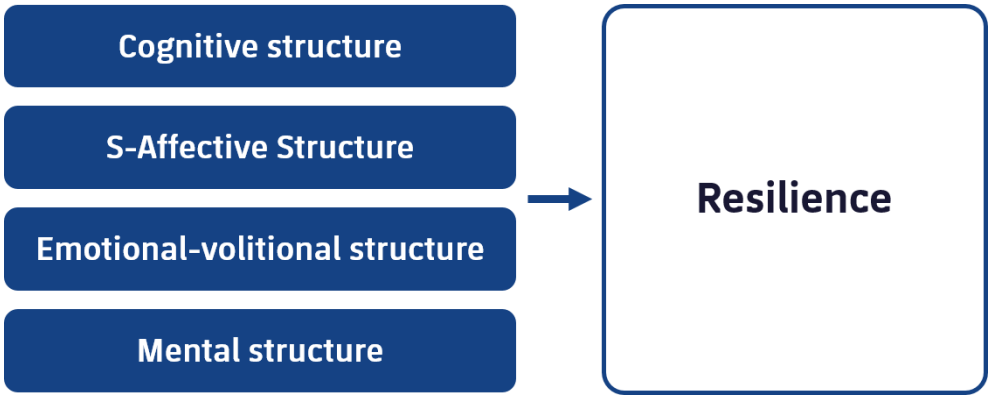
Figure 14. Practical examples



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Player structures and their link to resilience.

Figure 15. Practical examples

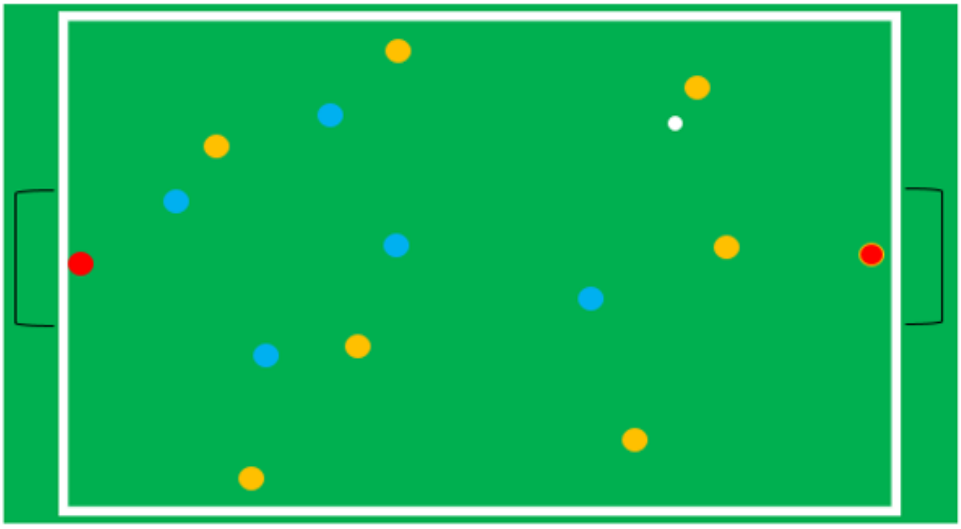


Source: Prepared by the authors.

This is manifested in all situations where adversities must be overcome:

- Adverse results during the course of the game.
- Playing at a numerical disadvantage (or with wild cards in the possession stage).
- Overcome moments of physical or mental difficulty.

Figure 16. Practical exercises



Source: Prepared by the authors.

It is important to emphasize the importance of the mental structure, and of how the coach introduces rules to provoke the most real-life reactions from the players in situations that are being optimized.

Importance of the pass as an element of communication

The smooth transfer of the ball is essential to prevail, so special attention should be paid to the pass. The pass is the means by which two or more people connect and relate to undertake a joint goal. The pass is the synthesis of collective play.

In all coaching schools, the pass is defined simply as a technical action in the game. But it's actually much more than a technical action.

The pass is the basis and the ultimate representation of the collective and associative game of any team sport, and much more so in the case of soccer, due to the great difficulty involved in playing with your feet.

In the pass, all the structures that interact in the athlete come into play during the game:

Conditional: the element of strength in the hit or contact with the ball.

Coordination: the technical action itself (the relationship between the player and the ball).

Cognitive: the identification, interpretation and understanding of the game that every pass requires.

Socio-affective: the ideas of "sharing", "playing as a team" and "generosity" among teammates.

Expressive-creative: an empathetic and assertive intracommunication between our players.

Emotional-volitional: the emotion and pleasure of dominating the game through the possession of the ball.

Mental: the conviction that in our passes we will be superior and dominate the game.

In reality, all the technical actions in soccer can be defined as passes, and also define the essence of **Our Game**.

All the variable components of the game (situation and trajectories of the ball, teammates and opponents) come together in the **overall organization of the team,** whose reference points are **the ball and the pass**.

That is why defining **Our Game** is synonymous with the concept of **passing**:

A systematic, constant and intentional repetition of interactions between all teammates, using the ball in order to organize the team itself, disorganize the opposing team and achieve the ultimate and final objective: the goal.

The connection between the players that is created through the pass requires both of them to adjust to their teammate's characteristics. A badly made pass is often the result of the player's lack of knowledge of his/her receiving teammate, such as kicking the ball too hard when the teammate doesn't have the resources to receive it. The more and better the players on the team know each other, the better their communication through passing will be.

To say **pass** is to say **soccer**.

To say **pass** is to say **ourgame**.

Team communication

Assertiveness and empathy are considered skills that athletes should train to optimize their social relationships and their communication. In team sports, these are socio-affective pathways, where verbal and non-verbal information circulates between players during training and competition. Interpersonal information, with its different meanings and

interpretations, is the result of the process the player goes through during his development as an athlete.

The objective of the coach, among others, is to optimize the communication among the team, and the ways to achieve it go hand-in-hand with the development of the skills mentioned: **empathy and assertiveness**.

Assertiveness comes from the Latin word *assertum* and means **affirming**. When using the term in everyday situations, it refers to the affirmation of one's own behavior and to confident and efficient communication. From a psychological point of view, the player feels self-confidence and self-esteem. All of this contributes positively to intra-group communication. Movement is the assertive-motor communication channel, which manifests itself through the different techniques or patterns of coordination in kinesthetic sports. All this is affective because it is directed at teammates who are requesting concrete action parameters. Playing assertively implies:

- Being clear and conveying what you want with a high level of security, as trained.
- Acting honestly when giving alternative solutions to help each other.
- Taking responsibility to ensure that communication happens the way that one player, his/her teammate and the team wants.

The methodological approach (training sessions) should be oriented with assertive-motor communication to be worked on as a team, and not individually. In other words: create situations where individuals can be empowered in favor of the team.

The coach must generate opportunities for this type of communication, and must provide the following:

- To ask athletes for an equal level of engagement; to set players up to reflect on the proposed objectives.
- Setting players up to accept the training approach with discipline and enough concentration, avoiding wasted efforts, indifference, irritability and mistaken prejudices regarding individual and collective skills.
- Create affective relationships that foster team spirit through collective actions. This is evident thanks to mutual assistance and cooperation.
- Encourage **collective unity** by coordinating team actions with the aim of achieving desired situations during the game. If they are carried out right, the idea is that collective actions that take place in training sessions are then transferred to games.

- Working on individual **referential experiences** allows players with less motor repertoire to reflect on and practice concrete actions carried out successfully by those with better skills.
- Practice feeling comfortable when the situation demands the action of others. This is called generative social evaluation, where dependence on the team is necessary.
- Understand that being assertive in movement is part of a process, not a state. The athlete understands that following a positive assertive motor interaction, feelings of control, confidence and trust in oneself and in the group arise.

Authors such as Kohut (1955), when referring to empathy argue that:

"All humans are capable of looking introspectively at our own experience, which allows us to interpret how another person might feel if they're in a situation similar to one we've already experienced".

In this case, it does not mean that one's own experience (e.g. motor) is identical to that of another, but just by finding similarities, we feel empathy for the other person, in line with the affective tension that connects us.

Assertiveness and empathy come together to form comprehensive communication with the objective of handling complex events in team sports from a socio-affective standpoint.

When the athlete manages to understand and interpret what happens and what's happening to his/her teammate, he is in tune with his assertive motion and empathetic resonance. This means that the player manages to predict the motor events that his/her teammate will encounter, and is able to interpret what he/she is going to feel during and after those events.

Seirul·lo (2017) proposes the following question: How will I be able to interact with my teammate as he/she would with him/herself if I do not know his/her priorities? In this case, cultural influence must be taken into account, since it not only affects sports training but all behavior that will influence affective relationships. Given the importance of cultural influence on affective behavior and athletes' motor skills, multiculturalism can be detrimental to assertive-empathetic communication.

Our history: teams, players and coaches

Since it was founded in 1899, many teams, players and coaches have made the history of F.C. Barcelona. Throughout this history, an image, a model and a club identity have formed that have now become a global reference. But there are four key moments that have marked this history:

1 The 1950s and especially the 1951-52 season in which, at the hands of coach Helenio Herrera and with players such as Kubala, Kocsis, Basora, Segarra and Biosca, the team managed to win 5 championships and went down in history as "The Barça of the 5 Cups".

2 The arrival of Rinus Michels as coach of the first team in the 1970-71 season, which marked the beginning of a new era. This coach brought a new idea from Dutch soccer based on a "Total Soccer" whose best models were Ajax Amsterdam and Holland's national team ("A Clockwork Orange"). They astonished the world during that time, and especially at the World Championship in Germany in 1974. It was based on an overall idea of offense-defense in which all players formed a tight-knit team, with significant physical effort but also with a high technical-tactical aspect in their playing style (hence the name Total Soccer). With this approach, FC Barcelona won the Liga of the 1973-74 season, in which Johan Cruyff joined as a player and became the real author this success.

3 Parallel to the arrival of Rinus Michels, coach Laureano Ruiz also joined FCB. He was advanced for his time and served as a true master for many players who later followed in his footsteps as coaches. He prioritized mastery of the ball (technique) and comprehension of playing as a team (tactics) over the physical aspects and laid the foundation for the future of FCB soccer. He won 5 consecutive Spanish youth championships, which was unprecedented, and from that era, many players emerged who ended up succeeding on the first team and in professional soccer.

4 The third great moment in the club's history was the arrival of Johan Cruyff as coach of the first team in 1988. It was Cruyff who brought in another new idea. His motto was: "Play for fun, enjoy playing". The game is to have fun; not to suffer. He changed many things and established a new style, a new philosophy and a playing model that is still used today. It made Barça's playing style a world reference and inspired the admiration of all. He established a 1-3-4-3 playing system for the whole club (from the first team all the way down to the youngest youth category), based on the possession of the ball, the correct positioning of the players on the field, the permanent assistance to be able to dominate the game at all times, the idea of creativity rather than destroying what the opposing team does, the absolute confidence in one's own possibilities and those of the team, and the joy transmitted by this game.

5 He was the architect of the famous "*Dream Team*" which won 4 consecutive Ligas and the club's first European Cup at Wembley in May 1992. The *Dream Team* won the world's heart, and has been the model for the entire club over the past 30 years.

6 And then comes the peak: the 2008-09 season in which Pep Guardiola joined as coach. Pep had been part of the *Dream Team* as a player, and with his intelligence, passion and extensive knowledge, he built what was possibly the best team of all time. He formed a technical staff with people he trusted, such as Paco Seirul·lo who became indispensable as the master physical trainer. He had a great personality and a profound knowledge of team sports, and had been Valero Ribera's right hand man on FCB's first handball team, obtaining 6 European championships and numerous Liga and Copa de España titles). They brought together a generation of exceptional soccer players who, over the next four years, won a total of 13 of the 16 titles played. The playing style developed by this team during those 4 years was one of soccer history's best, if not the best, examples of efficiency, effectiveness and beauty that accompanied a truly winning team that left a mark. The excellence with which this group of fantastic players embodied playing as a team has not been matched in the entire history of this sport. It was what has come to be called "The Perfect Storm" and, without a doubt, it marked a before and after.

This period continued into the following season (2012-13) with Tito Vilanova as coach, then in 2013-14 with Tata Martino (a season with no titles) and in the past 3 seasons (2014-17) with Luis Enrique as coach, in which the 8 titles won have allowed FC Barcelona to continue being a world reference. And now, in this 2017-18 season, with coach Ernesto Valverde, the club has renewed its commitment to continuing this playing model. Those of us who form part of the club's technical staff have the challenge, the responsibility and the commitment to continuing this model, which we call **Our Game**. It's different from the traditional style of soccer played by other teams, and thus admired and recognized around the world.

Without a doubt, the ultimate goal is to further this playing model and club identity and to ensure that the first team's roster is made up of the greatest possible number of players trained in our club. The most successful seasons of our first team have coincided with the presence of a high percentage of players trained in our club. The greatest example was in the 2012-13 season in which during a Liga game, the lineup included 11 players that were trained in our club.

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