Professional football squads as multicultural teams: Cultural diversity, intercultural experience, and team performance

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Abstract
After the Bosman ruling in 1995, the cultural diversity of professional football teams in Europe has increased considerably. Recruiting players regardless of their nationality allows football clubs to make use of a global talent pool and to combine the specific strengths of individuals with different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it confronts them with the challenge of having players who speak different languages and who have different football philosophies ingrained in them. Based on a structure–leadership–performance model, we test the impact of various cultural factors on team success against the background of archival data of 2483 players of 98 clubs in the 5 largest European football leagues (England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain). We find a negative effect of cultural diversity of the team and of intercultural experience of a coach on team performance. We derive implications for research on multicultural teams and for the management of football teams.

Keywords
Cultural diversity, culture, football, leadership, multicultural teams

Introduction
The European Champions League Final on May 19, 2012, between Football Club (FC) Bayern Munich and Chelsea Football Club at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany, was a multicultural event. In all, 8 of the 18 players of FC Bayern Munich and 13 of the 18 players of Chelsea FC were born outside the home countries of these two clubs. Altogether, players from 15 countries and 4 continents participated in the match, including Germany, Ukraine, Netherlands, France, Belgium,
Brazil, Japan, Croatia, Czech Republic, Portugal, Nigeria, England, Ivory Coast, Spain, and Ghana. Not only the teams but also the ownership of these FCs is multicultural. For example, Chelsea FC has a Russian club owner, an American chairman, an English chief executive officer, a Ukrainian director, and an Italian coach, Roberto Di Matteo. His Munich counterpart Jupp Heynckes is German, but spent a considerable part of his career in Portugal and Spain, where he coached Athletic Bilbao, Real Madrid, Sport Lisboa e Benfica, and Club Deportivo Tenerife.

Although two German teams played against each other in the 2013 Champions League final, only five players of FC Bayern Munich and seven players of Borussia Dortmund in the starting lineup were German. 12 players from 9 countries, including Austria, Brazil, Croatia, France, Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain, and Turkey, participated in the match in addition to the German players.

The cultural diversity of European football teams increased considerably after the European Court of Justice decided in 1995 that football is an economic activity and thus falls within the scope of the Treaty of Rome (Frick, 2009: 89). Article 39 (formerly Article 48) of the European Treaty guarantees the free movement of employees, which also includes football players (Szymanski, 2000: 592). Consequently, the limit on the number of players from other European Union (EU) countries to a maximum of three practiced until that year was deemed illegal. This decision, which became widely known as the Bosman ruling (named after the Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman who took his case to the European Court of Justice), gave clubs the ability to hire EU citizens without restrictions. As a consequence, the labor market of football teams became truly global. Figure 1 shows that since 1995, the number of foreign players in the five biggest European football leagues, England, Spain, Germany, Italy, and France (hereinafter referred to as the Big Five), has increased substantially. On average, foreign players accounted for around 43 percent of all players in 2009. The highest percentage (59 percent) was found in the English Premier League. For top clubs like Arsenal FC (93 percent) or Inter Milan (92 percent), the percentage of foreign players is even higher (Professional Football Players Observatory (PFPO), 2009).

The internationalization of football teams has several reasons. Weak national economies and financial crises cause the movement of playing talent from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern

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**Figure 1.** Percentage of foreign players in the Big Five European football leagues. Source: reproduced with permission from Poli et al. (2011); Transfermarkt (2012); Walters and Rossi (2009).
Europe to the West (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001). In particular, the wealthy Big Five are able to offer unrivaled financial rewards (Taylor, 2006: 16). Some clubs sign players for merchandising reasons with the aim to increase the attention in the players’ home countries. For example, in 2004 and 2005, Manchester United signed Chinese striker Dong Fangzhou and South Korean midfielder Ji-Sung Park to expand its fan base in these two Asian growth markets. For similar reasons, FC Schalke 04 recruited Atsudo Uchida from Japan (Holtbrügge and Maderer, 2012: 565), FC Bayern Munich recruited Ali Karimi from Iran (Puck and Wirth, 2009: 117), and Sporting Lisbon recruited India’s national captain Sunil Chhetri.

By signing foreign players, club officials also hope to benefit from the specific strengths of individuals with different cultural backgrounds. Football players with different origins often have diverse skills, as football education is focused on different qualifications (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001; Theweleit, 2009). For example, German clubs put more emphasis on discipline, power, and efficiency, Italian clubs are well known for their good tactical skills, while in Brazil technical skills are more important (Müller, 2009: 273). The compilation of diverse skills in multicultural football teams is thus expected to enhance their success. Particularly since France won the 1998 World Cup with nearly half of the team consisting of players whose parents immigrated to the country from Algeria (Zinedine Zidane), Argentina (David Trezeguet), Armenia (Youri Djorkaeff), French Guiana (Bernard Lama), Ghana (Marcel Desailly), Guadeloupe (Bernard Diomède, Lilian Thuram), Lesser Antilles (Thierry Henry), New Caledonia (Christian Karembeu), and Senegal (Patrick Vieira), several FCs aim to leverage the benefits of cultural diversity (Kassimeris, 2011). This makes football squads a prime example of multicultural teams.

The impact of cultural diversity on team performance has been analyzed in numerous empirical studies (for an overview, see Earley and Mosakowski, 2000; Gibson, 1999; Milliken and Martins, 1996; Stahl et al., 2010; Thomas, 1999; Williams and O’Reilly, 1998; Zhou and Shi, 2011). However, their findings are contradictory. While some studies showed positive effects of culturally heterogeneous teams (e.g. Cox et al., 1991; Elron, 1997; Gibson, 1999), other studies yielded negative effects (e.g. Chevrier, 2003; Govindarajan and Gupta, 2001; Henderson, 2005; Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000; Millhous, 1999) or revealed a curvilinear relationship between cultural diversity and team performance (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). A major reason for these mixed results is that previous studies are limited by several methodological shortcomings.

First, a common practice in multicultural team research is the use of student samples (e.g. Chatman and Flynn, 2001; Cox et al., 1991; Gibson, 1999; Harrison et al., 2002; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Thomas, 1999; Thomas et al., 1996; Watson et al., 1993; Zhou and Shi, 2011). Even though this allows researchers to gain easy access to a large number of participants, it is doubtful whether the results can be transferred to real-life teams who are exposed to several time constraints and economic restrictions (Berg and Holtbrügge, 2010: 193). Second, previous studies often focus on teams that are composed ad hoc (e.g. Cox et al., 1991; Gibson, 1999; Kilduff et al., 2000; Thomas et al., 1996). Only Earley and Mosakowski (2000) analyze multicultural teams that had already been working together for a longer period of time. It can be expected, however, that groups with both a history and future of cooperation will behave differently than groups that have been composed only for the reason of the study (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000; Salk and Brannen, 2000). These teams might act in a different way than artificially generated teams. Third, previous studies apply different measures of team performance, such as subjective performance ratings depending on self-perceptions (e.g. Earley and Mosakowski, 2000; Pelled et al., 1999), the number and the quality of ideas/solutions generated (e.g., McLeod et al., 1996; Watson et al., 1993), or psychological commitment, number of absences, job satisfaction, and the intention to stay (Tsui et al., 1992; Verkuyten
et al., 1993). This makes the comparison of results difficult. Finally, cultural diversity is often not adequately reflected in existing studies. For example, Kilduff et al. (2000) measure team members’ cultural background with nationality, Earley and Mosakowski (2000) use self-assessments, whereas Cox et al. (1991) and Gibson (1999) refer to the individualism/collectivism dimension of Hofstede (1980) to discriminate between homogenous and heterogeneous teams.

In comparison with previous research on global teams, the analysis of football squads has several advantages. First, detailed information on players and coaches in professional FCs is readily available in the public domain and has been found to be more accurate in comparison with typical microdata samples (Kahn, 2000: 75). Furthermore, the prevalence of data related to on-pitch performance and the knowledge of players’ nationality allows much more detailed analyses than in other industries (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999; Zehle, 2005). For example, alternative measures of cultural diversity may be combined to test for their robustness. Finally, the duration of membership of footballers in one club ranges between 1 and 6 years (Teichmann, 2007: 245). Thus, football teams are working together for a relatively long period of time, which allows the consideration of time effects.

The aim of this article is to analyze whether multicultural team composition and team leadership have an impact on the performance of professional football teams. We seek to derive useful recommendations for managers of FCs as to how they can assemble their teams efficiently in terms of cultural composition. Moreover, we aim to contribute to the general literature on multicultural teams.

The remaining part of the article is organized as follows. In the next section, we will provide a brief overview of existing studies on multicultural team composition with a particular focus on sports teams. Based on this literature review, we will then develop a structure–leadership–performance model of multicultural teams and derive our research hypotheses. Afterward, we will explain the methodology of our study. Based on the secondary data, we examine the cultural determinants of the success of professional football teams in the Big Five. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the main results. In the final section, the key aspects of our study are summarized, contributions for practice and further research are presented, and limitations are outlined.

Theory and hypotheses

Overview of existing studies. Although multicultural teams are an important phenomenon in many team sports, little research in this area has been conducted. Previous publications in this field are mostly devoted to the effects of racism and discrimination (Kahn, 2000; Kahn and Sherer, 1988; Preston and Szymanski, 2000; Scully, 1974; Szymanski, 2000; Wilson and Ying, 2003), while only few studies deal with the performance effects of multicultural team composition. An overview of these studies is presented in Table 1.

Based on the data of 306 matches of the German Bundesliga in the season 2000/01, Gaede et al. (2002) find that culturally diverse teams achieve a higher average team performance, but the results of t tests are not significant. The highest impact on team performance is the team’s market value and the team structure regarding the level of experience. Based on the results of the study, the authors argue that the right mixture of experienced and inexperienced players is beneficial for team success. From the positive impact of cultural heterogeneity, they conclude that football teams can profit from different technical skills and the creativity of foreign players.

Andresen and Altmann (2006) confirm the assumption of Gaede et al. (2002) by revealing a significantly positive relationship between national diversity and sporting success of professional football teams. They conclude that teams can benefit from the multiple perspectives and diverse cultures of players. No significant impact of national diversity on economic success is found.
Furthermore, the study shows a significant positive effect of social status diversity and a significant negative influence of the diversity of experience on sporting success. In contrast, the diversity of age, team affiliation, and individual performance does not significantly affect sporting success.

Fritz (2006) analyzes the effect of the squad size, the cultural diversity of the team, the relative team salary, the percentage of players from the club’s own youth team, the percentage of expiring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Measuring of cultural diversity</th>
<th>Effect of cultural diversity</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaede et al.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Book chapter</td>
<td>The higher the cultural diversity of a team, the less successful it is</td>
<td>Number of different nationalities within a team</td>
<td>No significant impact</td>
<td>306 matches of German Bundesliga 2000–2001</td>
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<td>Andresen and Altmann</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Zeitschrift Führungs + Organization</td>
<td>Cultural diversity has a positive influence on sporting and economic success</td>
<td>Blau index</td>
<td>Significantly positive impact on sporting success; no impact on economic success</td>
<td>German Bundesliga 1999–2004</td>
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<td>Fritz</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PhD dissertation</td>
<td>The higher the cultural diversity within the main team, the lower the efficiency</td>
<td>Number of different nationalities within the team</td>
<td>No significant impact</td>
<td>German Bundesliga 1997–2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wulf and Hungenberg</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Working paper</td>
<td>The higher the cultural differences of a team, the higher the success</td>
<td>Percentage of squad members who speak a dominant native language</td>
<td>Significantly positive impact</td>
<td>21 clubs in Germany 1999–2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teichmann</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>PhD dissertation</td>
<td>The more heterogeneous the cultural composition of a team, the higher the sporting success</td>
<td>Teachman diversity index</td>
<td>No significant impact</td>
<td>28 clubs of German Bundesliga 1999–2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandes et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Schmalenbach Business Review</td>
<td>The more culturally heterogeneous a team is, the more successful it is</td>
<td>Number of different nationalities within a team</td>
<td>No significant impact</td>
<td>German Bundesliga 2001–2006</td>
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contracts, the tenure of players, the percentage of new players, and the number of managerial dismissals on sporting success. The relative team salary has a positive influence on the sporting success, while managerial dismissals as well as the squad size have a negative impact. For all other variables, including cultural heterogeneity, no significant results are found.

In contrast to the previous studies, Wulf and Hungenberg (2006) also tested for a possible influence of the team’s coach on sporting success. Besides the findings that greater cultural diversity and greater experience of the team contribute significantly to sporting success, the study reveals that the age of the coach also has a positive significant effect on sporting success, while the experience and tenure of a coach show no influence.

Teichmann (2007) analyzes the influence of the squad composition and the impact of the coach on sporting success. In addition to the cultural composition of a team, the influence of age structure, market value, size of the squad, team fluctuation, and the market value structure is considered. The study reveals a highly significant relationship between the combined factors of squad composition and sporting success. However, with market value, only one highly significant predictor of success is identified. All other regressors are not significant, including the cultural structure of the team. The reputation of the coach as measured based on his success during the last 10 seasons has a significantly positive impact on team success.

In a more recent study, Brandes et al. (2009) analyze the impact of cultural heterogeneity, age structure, experience, squad size, and relative budget on the sporting success of professional football teams. Generally, the authors find no significant influence of cultural heterogeneity. However, by testing the effects of cultural heterogeneity in different parts of a team (defense, midfield, and offense), they find a significantly negative result for the defense. The authors argue that the defense requires a particularly high degree of communication, which is complicated when players with different native languages interact.

By summing up previous research, we can distinguish four groups of variables that have been identified in order to explain the success of professional football teams. For the first group of variables—a squad’s cultural composition—Andresen and Altmann (2006) and Wulf and Hungenberg (2006) reveal a positive impact of cultural diversity on team success, while Brandes et al. (2009), Fritz (2006), Gaede et al. (2002), and Teichmann (2007) do not find significant relationships. A reason for these mixed results may be different measurements of cultural diversity that range from the number of different nationalities within a team (Brandes et al., 2009; Fritz, 2006; Gaede et al., 2002) to more sophisticated measures such as the Blau index (Andresen and Altmann, 2006) and the Teachman index (Teichmann, 2007). The second group of variables that were included in previous studies contains further team attributes such as average age (Brandes et al., 2009), age diversity (Andresen and Altmann, 2006; Gaede et al., 2002; Teichmann, 2007; Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006), and team size (Brandes et al., 2009; Fritz, 2006; Teichmann, 2007). For these variables, ambivalent findings have also been found. The third group of variables focuses on the attributes of the coach. In particular, the impact of his age (Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006) and his tenure in the club (Teichmann, 2007; Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006) were analyzed, while the intercultural experience of a coach and his nationality has been neglected so far. The last group of variables that were previously analyzed look at the economic power of FCs. The studies of Gaede et al. (2002) and Teichmann (2007) highlight the crucial role of a team’s market value that has the highest explanatory power compared to any other variable.

In the following section, we develop research hypotheses based on the findings of previous studies. With regard to the aim of this study, we focus on cultural factors on the team level and on the level of the team coach. Further factors that have been proven as relevant are considered as control
variables. These considerations lead to a structure–leadership–performance model of professional football teams, which will be explained in the following.

**Hypotheses**

*Cultural heterogeneity*. The composition of a team is the most important strategic decision an FC has to make (Gaede et al., 2002: 216). By employing multicultural teams, a club seeks to tap the advantages of cultural heterogeneity. One of the key arguments of the advantageousness of cultural heterogeneous teams is that the variety of perspectives and experiences contributes to creativity, adaptability, innovation, and higher quality problem solutions (McLeod et al., 1996: 257; Wiersema and Bantel, 1992: 93). We find similar arguments in the field of professional football teams. Football players with different origins are said to have distinctive strengths, as football education in particular countries is focused on different aspects (Gaede et al., 2002: 236). While German players are said to be disciplined, strong, powerful, efficient, and straightforward, Brazilians are known for their technical skills, and Italians are sound in tactics (Müller, 2009: 273). There is evidence that the combination of players with different cultural backgrounds may have a positive effect on team performance (Andresen and Altmann, 2006; Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006).

However, previous studies in the team management literature reveal that cultural heterogeneity may not only positively influence team performance but also have negative effects (Chevrier, 2003; Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000). Such ambiguous results are confirmed in the field of conflict management (Elron, 1997; Henderson, 2005; Millhous, 1999) as well as in studies analyzing motivation and trust building (DiStefano and Maznevski, 2000; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). Additionally, the similarity–attraction paradigm argues that people are attracted to working with people with similar values, beliefs, and attitudes (Williams and O’Reilly, 1998). Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) reasons that the more culturally different individuals are, the more likely they tend to categorize themselves into specific groups and to negatively assess and judge others as outsiders to maintain a positive social identity. Subgroups are commonly formed, especially in football teams, due to the size of the team and the great cultural differences within the team. For instance, subgroups that comprise Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking players from South America have been observed in football teams (Teichmann, 2007: 165). An extreme example is the German FC Hertha BSC Berlin, where a group of young professionals with a migration background developed a secret language to distinguish themselves from their teammates. This had a negative impact on team communication and team cohesion, and ultimately on team success (Priggemeier, 2007).

Another possible reason for the ambivalence of previous studies is seen in the insufficient considerations of different conditions under which teams operate. Previous research considers the nature of the task as a possible moderator and highlights that culturally heterogeneous teams are more likely to perform successfully on tasks that are well defined, demand-coordinated activities, and require simple responses (Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000; Stewart, 2006; Stahl et al., 2009). In addition, Kruglanski and Webster (1991) provide some evidence that groups working on tasks under time pressure are less open to conflicting perspectives than groups that worked without such time constraints.

These findings are readily transferable to the context of football and thus may oppose the value-in-diversity assumptions. First, the objectives of a football match should be clear for all players no matter which nationality they have, as the rules of football are universally valid, information is ubiquitous, and the ultimate task is relatively simple, that is, to score more goals than the opponent. Second, there is a strong division of labor (e.g. between goalkeeper, central defenders, left- and right backs, center midfielders, defensive midfielders, attacking midfielders, wingers, and strikers), and
the roles and responsibilities of football players are highly standardized, while their activities are mostly coordinated by organizational routines (Pentland and Rueter, 1994). Third, professional football teams extensively plan the patterns of activity that will occur on the field (Soriano, 2011).

Most of the energy that is put into coordinating a football team’s game-time activities is spent during practice, long before the game is actually played. During the game itself, most of the team members merely perform, on cue, those action sequences that they have been trained to perform. (Larson and Schaumann, 1993: 50)

As a result, many goals are scored from set pieces, which require less creativity than precision, exerting clearly defined roles. For example, 28 percent of all the Premier League goals registered in season 2012/13 originated from a dead ball situation, while 26 percent of all Champions League goals were scored from set pieces (www.whoscored.com). Finally, activities on the pitch must be coordinated instantly and require relatively simple responses. Based on these considerations, we propose:

**Hypothesis 1a:** The higher the cultural heterogeneity of a team, the less successful it is.

**Cultural distance.** Previous research reveals that team performance is affected not only by the number of different nationalities in a team but also by the cultural distance between the team members. For example, according to Hofstede, a German player and a Swiss player are culturally more similar than a German player and a Japanese player. While the Euclidean cultural distance between Germany and Switzerland is 2.89, it is 17.22 in the case of Germany and Japan. We expect teams with a higher cultural distance to generally have a lower team performance. Based on the similarity–attraction paradigm, players from countries with a high cultural distance are assumed to be less attractive because they do not share the other culture’s beliefs about the world and increase the risk of conflicts (Morry, 2005). Thus, in teams with a large number of players from different cultures, different values, goals, beliefs, and languages pose a high risk for misunderstanding. This often leads to a lack of understanding of the viewpoints of other team members (Earley and Gibson, 2002) and hinders the building of a cohesive unit. Team cohesion, however, is a crucial factor in multicultural football teams as highlighted by Jupp Heynckes, current coach of FC Bayern München (Mondialogo, 2005). He observed that, “the most successful teams are those who understand themselves in interpersonal, including intercultural, relationships.” Thus, we expect cultural differences to influence the success of a team in a negative way and to influence success even more negatively than cultural heterogeneity.

**Hypothesis 1b:** The higher the cultural distance of a team, the less successful it is.

**Hypothesis 1c:** The negative impact of cultural distance on team success is stronger than that of cultural heterogeneity.

**Collectivism.** Several intercultural management studies demonstrate that the individualism–collectivism dimension guides the overall behavior of people and is therefore often considered the core dimension of culture (Hofstede, 1980; Sivadas et al., 2008; Triandis et al., 1988). Also, in multicultural teams, individualism versus collectivism plays an important role. For example, Cox et al. (1991) and Gibson (1999) use this dimension to distinguish homogenous from heterogeneous teams.

Only a minority of people live in societies where the interests of the individual are superior to the interests of the group. Collectivism, which emphasizes the interdependence of every human being,
refers to the importance of the “we” or group identity. As football is a team sport, the question arises whether this cultural imprint has an impact on the success of a team. Today, strongly individualistic positions such as the playmaker or sweeper have been rendered almost completely obsolete because they make teams predictable. In addition, strong individuals who cannot subordinate to common goals are considered to be detrimental for team building and team cohesion. In modern football, the promotion of team spirit comes to the fore. For example, the former coach of Real Madrid, José Mourinho, criticized his star player Cristiano Ronaldo for being too individualistic and mentioned this as a reason for why his former club was not able to win the Champions League during his 3-year term. On the other hand, the success of Bayern Munich in the season 2012/13 is often ascribed to the fact that the two highly individualistic players, Franck Ribéry and Arjen Robben, accepted the need to bow to the team order and became team players (Hayward, 2013).

Based on those considerations, we argue that it is easier for players from collectivist cultures to do their utmost for the team’s success and to subordinate their goals to the goals of the team. Collectivist players will behave in a manner that best suits the interests of the team, even if the team’s interests may not always coincide with their individual interests. On the contrary, Gert Jan Hofstede (cited in FH-Landshut, 2009) attributes the poor performance of the Dutch national football team to the fact that highly individualistic Dutchmen do not like to subordinate themselves and their own goals to the goals of the team. Therefore, we propose a positive correlation between collectivism and success.

**Hypothesis 2:** The more collectivist a team is, the more successful it is.

**Intercultural experience of the coach.** Similar to top managers, the coach of a team has a large impact on sporting success or failure (Birkinshaw and Crainer, 2002; Teichmann, 2007). His tasks include the formation of the team, the motivation of players, conflict resolution, promotion of cohesion, and the avoidance of subgrouping. These leadership tasks are even more difficult when a team consists of many players from different cultural backgrounds. When various cultural obstacles are not identified and resolved by the coach, a reduction of team performance has been observed (Teichmann, 2007).

The impact of intercultural experience of managers on the leadership of multicultural teams has been extensively discussed in previous research (Mendenhall et al., 2013). For example, studies reveal that internationally experienced managers are able to synthesize best practices from different cultures toward a competitive advantage (Cassiday, 2005). Moreover, the impact of cross-cultural communication competence on team performance has been revealed (Matveev and Nelson, 2004).

With regard to football teams, we argue that coaches with intercultural experience are more likely to communicate successfully with team members from other cultures and to consider different values and strengths. Jupp Heynckes (cited in Mondialogo, 2005) is aware of these leadership capabilities when he states:

Particularly as a coach abroad, I have learned that communication, respect and sensitivity are crucial for the success of the team. With hard training and simply good preparation you cannot establish a top team. Intercultural dialogue is just as important as footballing talent. (…) When I talk to a player, I need to know how his childhood was, what religion he has, if he misses his home, his culture, his family. It must be communicated over and over again to sensitively and respectfully deal with it as a team and integrating him into the team.
It is assumed that coaches who have a high level of intercultural experience are more aware of the obstacles facing multicultural teams and are able to solve their problems more effectively, which invariably leads to higher team performance. Accordingly, we propose:

**Hypothesis 3**: The intercultural experience of the coach moderates the relationship between the cultural distance and the success of the team in a positive way.

Figure 2 illustrates the hypothesized relationships between the cultural composition of a football team, the intercultural experience of its coach, and team performance.

### Methodology

**Sample and data collection**

Our study is based on secondary data retrieved from the Web sites www.fussballdaten.de and www.transfermarkt.de. Both Web sites belong to the biggest football databases in Germany and contain comprehensive statistics about European football leagues. For example, the coverage of www.transfermarkt.de is particularly impressive with information on 190,000 players across 330 football competitions (Bryson et al., 2012: 6). Both databases are regarded as reliable sources of information pertaining to football by leading sports economists (Bryson et al., 2012; Franck and Nüesch, 2012; Franck et al., 2011; Teichmann, 2007) and have excellent coverage of players in the Big Five.

We analyzed the five largest European football leagues because they generate more than half of the total sales (52 percent) of the entire European football market (Deloitte, 2011). The financial strength of these leagues is also evident in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) rankings, in which these countries occupy the first five positions (Walters and Rossi, 2009: 36). We chose a medium-term time horizon and analyzed the season of 2008/09, with an overall percentage of foreign players in the Big Five of 42.6 percent. In total, 98 teams from the respective first divisions were analyzed. Out of 2848 players, we considered the 2483 players who played in at least one match for their club (Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006: 13). In the same vein, we only considered
coaches who were responsible for the majority of their clubs’ matches in this season. This is based on the assumption that these coaches contributed the most to the success or failure of their clubs in our period of observation.

**Measures**

**Dependent variable.** The most important goal of any professional football team is to achieve sporting success. This can be measured in numerous ways (Lehmann and Weigand, 1997: 388). A widespread method to measure success is where a team is placed in its league table (i.e. points attained, goal difference, and individual performance ratings of players). However, there are also financial indicators, such as revenues from ticket sales, television rights, merchandising, and proceeds from transfers. Previous studies showed that the financial power of a club has a significantly positive impact on its sporting success and that the market value of a team is the best predictor of its performance (Brandes et al., 2009: 240; Hall et al., 2002: 166; Teichmann, 2007: 349). We take this effect into account by calculating our dependent variable as the average number of points a team earned per match in one season divided by the market value of the team. Our dependent variable “points to market value ratio” (PMVR) is a measure of relative performance, which is similar to common performance measures of business firms, such as return on investment or return on capital employed. This conceptualization makes our study more comparable to teams outside of the football context where relative performance criteria are also often relevant. Information on the market value of a football team was calculated as the sum of the market values of all team members and obtained from www.transfermarkt.de at the end of the season. Market values of players at the beginning of a season were not available as this database does not provide archival data. However, Torgler and Schmidt (2007: 2360) showed that the market value within a season strongly correlates with the pre-seasonal (0.82) as well as the post-seasonal market value (0.83) of a team. The market values from www.transfermarkt.de are estimated by industry experts and include not only salaries but also signing fees, bonuses, and transfer fees (Franck and Nüesch, 2012).

**Independent variables.** Following Gomez (2002) and Teichmann (2007), cultural heterogeneity of a team was calculated using the heterogeneity index created by Teachman (1980) with the following formula:

\[
\text{Cultural heterogeneity} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left( P_i \times \ln(P_i) \right) \times (-1)
\]

In the first step, we calculated the number of players with nationality \((i)\) and divided this by the number of players in the team \((P_i)\). In the second step, for each nationality the product \(P_i \times (\ln(P_i))\) was calculated. Afterward, these terms were multiplied and then summed together. For standardization across various team sizes, we divided each value by its theoretical maximum \((-1 \times \ln(1/n))\). The index equals 0 when all members are in the same category (e.g. Athletic Bilbao) and 1 when the group members are spread evenly over the entire number of categories \((-1 \times \ln(1/n))\). The greater the distribution across different nationalities, the higher is the score. The detailed procedure is illustrated by the example of the culturally most heterogeneous team, Liverpool FC (Table 2).

While this index of cultural heterogeneity takes into account the number of players from different countries, no consideration is made for the cultural similarities and differences of the team members. Therefore, we also calculated the mean cultural distance of a team on the basis of the Euclidian distance (Wagner et al., 1984). This individual-level measure represents the distance between the
Table 2. Exemplary calculation of cultural heterogeneity of Liverpool Football Club.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of players with nationality (i)</th>
<th>ARG</th>
<th>BRA</th>
<th>DEN</th>
<th>FIN</th>
<th>FRA</th>
<th>IRL</th>
<th>ISR</th>
<th>ITA</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>NL</th>
<th>SVK</th>
<th>SPA</th>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage ( P_i ) in relation to team size</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( (P_i \times \ln(P_i)) \times (-1) )</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theoretical maximum

\[ -1 \times (\ln(1/n)); \text{ with } n = 23 \]

Standardized cultural heterogeneity

\[ \frac{-1 \times (\ln(1/n))}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (P_i \times \ln(P_i)) \times (-1)} \]

\[ = 0.77 \]

ARG: Argentina; BRA: Brazil; DEN: Denmark; FIN: Finland; FRA: France; IRL: Ireland; ITA: Italy; NL: Netherlands; SPA: Spain; ENG: England; ISR: Israel; MAR: Morocco; SVK: Slovakia.
focal individual and the average of all other group members. It has been used by a number of organizational demography researchers to assess individual distance (O’Reilly et al., 1989; Tsui et al., 1992). Following Thomas (1999), the cultural distance is calculated by adapting the index of Kogut and Singh (1988) to multicultural teams.

The calculation of cultural distance involves five steps. First, each player was assigned a value for each of the four Hofstede dimensions \( (j) \) according to his nationality. After that, we determined the cultural distance of each player \( (k) \) to each other team member \( (l) \) on the basis of Hofstede’s values \( (I_j) \) by means of the squared Euclidean distance. This resulted in a distance matrix that is illustrated in Table 3 for eight players of Chelsea FC.

\[
I_{k,l} = \sum_{j=1}^{4} (I_{j,k} - I_{j,l})^2
\]

Then the values for all distances of all players were added and divided by the number of distance relationships \( (n \times (n - 1)) \) and multiplied by the number of cultural dimensions (4). Finally, we extracted the root of the term.

\[
\text{Cultural distance} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{k,l=1}^{n} I_{k,l}}{n \times (n - 1) \times 4}}
\]

Collectivism was measured using the individualism/collectivism scores of Hofstede (2001). The values for all players in a team were added up and then divided by the number of team members. Then, we subtracted the team values from 100 to analyze the effects of collectivism, not individualism \( (100 - x) \), that is, a value of 0 indicates maximum individualism and a value of 100 indicates maximum collectivism.

The intercultural experience of coaches was measured by a dummy variable. We differentiated between coaches who had worked in at least two different countries in the previous 5 years (1) and coaches who had worked only in one country (0). This is based on the assumption that coaches who work abroad collect useful information about tactics, formations, and football education styles in different leagues and have a higher intercultural experience and greater expertise of managing culturally diverse teams.

Table 3. Exemplary calculation of cultural distance for eight players of Chelsea Football Club.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: CZ</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>3047</td>
<td>2573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: ITA</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>2247</td>
<td>2247</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: POR</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: BRA</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>2247</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>5727</td>
<td>1265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: BRA</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>2247</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>5727</td>
<td>1265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: POR</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: ENG</td>
<td>3047</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>5727</td>
<td>5727</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: POR</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CZ: Czech Republic; ITA: Italy; POR: Portugal; BRA: Brazil; ENG: England.
Control variables. We included three control variables on the team level, namely, the number of players in the squad, the average age of a team, and the age diversity of a team, which was also measured by Euclidean distance. Additionally, we controlled for the number of second yellow cards and red cards received in a match, as they lead to an immediate reduction of players, which in turn may have a negative effect on team performance. An analogy in the business sector is the withdrawal of work permits in a foreign country after violating local labor laws. With regard to the team coach, we controlled for the age of the coach, the tenure of the coach in their actual club, and whether the coach was foreign or from the club’s country.

Findings

Descriptive statistics. Table 4 presents the means, SDs, and correlation coefficients of all variables in our study. It shows significant correlations between age diversity as well as cultural diversity, cultural heterogeneity, intercultural experience of a coach, and team success. The correlation between cultural heterogeneity and cultural distance is very high (0.784; \( p < 0.01 \)), even though both variables are measured very differently. In separate analyses of these two variables, large differences can be found. For example, the team with the greatest cultural heterogeneity, Liverpool FC, ranks only ninth in terms of cultural distance. Notably, the first 13-ranked teams in terms of cultural distance are English teams, while German teams rank higher in terms of cultural heterogeneity (the second-, third-, and fourth-ranked teams in terms of cultural heterogeneity are German). Therefore, separate analyses of the two variables are appropriate.

Test of hypotheses. Before computing a multivariate regression analysis, we checked for potential multicollinearity of our data. Variance inflation factors are all smaller than 2 and thus far below the critical value of 10, as recommended by Chatterjee and Price (1991) and Cohen et al. (2003). Therefore, there are no concerns of multicollinearity. To test the hypotheses, we conducted six regression analyses, which is shown in Table 5. The first regression is calculated with the control variables only, while the independent cultural variables are integrated stepwise in the following models. In model 2, cultural heterogeneity of a team is included, while in model 3, the latter is replaced by cultural distance. In model 4, collectivism is added. Model 5 additionally contains the intercultural experience of the coach. Finally, model 6 checks for potential moderator effects of the intercultural experience of the coach on the relationship between the cultural distance of a team and team success. Except for model 1, all models are statistically significant on a 0.01 level. The regression analyses show that a moderate percentage of the variance of our dependent variable can be explained by our independent variables (0.045 < adjusted \( R^2 < 0.183 \)).

In the first step, we evaluated the fit of model 1 that only contains the control variables. The results of model 1 (\( F = 1.571, p > 0.10 \)) show that the control variables have only nonsignificant effects on our dependent variable. In model 2, we included cultural heterogeneity in order to test hypothesis 1a in which we propose a negative impact of cultural heterogeneity on team performance. This is supported by our results as the regression coefficient is highly significant at \( p < 0.05 \) level. A similar result is revealed by model 3, where we replaced cultural heterogeneity with cultural distance. The coefficient is again negative at \( p < 0.05 \) level. As a result, we can also support hypothesis 1b. The \( \beta \)-value for cultural distance (0.375) is higher than the value for cultural heterogeneity (0.348), meaning that we can also support hypothesis 1c. No support for hypothesis 2 is found, which proposed a positive impact of collectivism on team performance; in all models, the coefficients are not significant. In hypothesis 3, we assumed that the relationship between the
### Table 4. Descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Number of players in the squad</td>
<td>25.347</td>
<td>3.172</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Average age of team (years)</td>
<td>25.513</td>
<td>1.264</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Age diversity of team</td>
<td>6.159</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Number of second yellow cards</td>
<td>2.265</td>
<td>2.033</td>
<td>0.224*</td>
<td>0.209*</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Number of red cards</td>
<td>2.132</td>
<td>1.733</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Collectivism</td>
<td>39.340</td>
<td>9.403</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>0.289**</td>
<td>0.299**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Cultural distance</td>
<td>19.415</td>
<td>6.466</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>-0.346**</td>
<td>-0.294**</td>
<td>-0.281**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Cultural heterogeneity</td>
<td>0.423</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.278**</td>
<td>-0.205**</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.784**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Age of coach (years)</td>
<td>48.929</td>
<td>6.914</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.160</td>
<td>-0.117</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Tenure of coach</td>
<td>28.357</td>
<td>34.806</td>
<td>-0.174</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>0.234*</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>0.270**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Foreign coach</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
<td>-0.196</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.208*</td>
<td>0.231**</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Intercultural experience of coach</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>-0.121</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Team success (PMVR)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>-0.211*</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>-0.312**</td>
<td>-0.338**</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.168</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
<td>-0.207*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PMVR: points to market value ratio.  

\( n = 98; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 \).
cultural distance and the success of the team is moderated by the intercultural experience of the coach. Model 6 does not confirm a significant moderating effect. Interestingly, the intercultural experience of a coach directly influences team performance in a significantly negative way.

With regard to our control variables, the number of red cards received over a season has a significantly negative influence on team success. Moreover, although low in significance, a negative influence of age diversity is found. Our analysis shows no influence of team size, average age, and second yellow cards on team performance.

**Discussion**

While our hypotheses 1a–c were supported, we could not confirm that collectivism has a positive effect on team success. One possible reason is the lack of accepting responsibilities when a team consists of a large number of members from collectivist countries (Hui, 1988: 29). As the former Japanese national coach Ivan Osim argues, individual responsibility is important for football players because not all situations in a football match can be resolved by the team (cited in Federmair and Kellermann, 2008). When nobody wants to step out of the collectivism, a lack of willingness to take over responsibility occurs and no action is taken. Another possible explanation could be that we did not differentiate between different forms of collectivism. For example, two players from the same collectivist culture may find it easier to cooperate than players from different collectivist countries. Gannon (2009: 282) describes many different types of individualism and collectivism particular to each national culture, for example, competitive individualism for the United States as expressed in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Regression on team success.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of players in the squad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age diversity of team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of second yellow cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of red cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure of coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural heterogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural experience of coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator intercultural experience of coach × cultural distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$Adjusted $R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 98$; *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; ****$p < 0.001$. 

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American football and proud individualism for Spain as expressed in the Spanish bullfight. More generally, researchers have suggested that the dichotomy between individualist and collectivist cultures is too simplistic to account for different attitudes of individuals toward group membership. Thus, attention should be paid to a more comprehensive measurement of this construct (Shavitt et al., 2006: 339).

This study also cannot confirm a moderating effect of intercultural experience of coaches on the relationship between cultural distance and team success. Contrary to our expectations, the impact of the intercultural experience of the coach on team success is even negative. One possible reason is that a variety of tactical formations exist in European football leagues that cannot be transferred from one country to another. For instance, offense, discipline, and power are important in Germany, while the Italian system concentrates on defense and tactics. A Spanish player is more likely to be inclined to the possession of the ball, whereas a Brazilian might base his activity on the creativity and the spectacular nature of the game. Thus, coaches with experience in both countries who attempt to combine elements of both styles are likely to fail. Another explanation of this finding may be that mainly less successful coaches seek job opportunities abroad. While examples of coaches such as José Mourinho or Jupp Heynckes are often quoted as those who led teams in two or more countries to national championships, many coaches obviously accept foreign assignment because of lacking alternatives. In many cases, the conditions abroad are worse than in the home country. A prominent example of this phenomenon is Berti Vogts. After being fired as German national coach, he worked as a coach in Kuwait, Scotland, Nigeria, and currently Azerbaijan with far less success. Another example from the club level is the former Italian national goalkeeper Walter Zenga. During our period of observation, he worked as a coach of six teams from five different countries (Italy, Serbia, Turkey, Romania, and the United Arab Emirates) without success.

With regard to our control variables, the number of red cards has a significantly negative effect on team success. When a player receives a red card, he is required to leave the field immediately. In contrast to receiving a second yellow card, he is often suspended for more of the following matches. This may explain the stronger effect of red cards compared with that of second yellow cards.

Moreover, our findings reveal a significantly negative effect of age diversity on team performance. According to the similarity–attraction paradigm, team members of the same age group are attracted to work together because they have common life experiences leading to similar attitudes and interests which in turn has a positive effect on team processes. Thus, similar to cultural homogeneity, football teams seem to benefit from a homogeneous age structure, while the average age of the players does not affect team success. This may be explained by the fact that the age interval of football teams, in contrast to many other organizations, is generally low. Most players are aged between 20 and 35 years, which is also reflected by the low SD of this variable. Finally, no influence is revealed for the number of players in the squad. Although squad sizes differ remarkably in our sample, the number of players on the field is standardized to 11. This distinguishes sport teams from those in many other organizations where minimum or maximum numbers of team members typically do not exist.

**Contributions, limitations, and implications for future research**

The aim of this article was to investigate the relationship between the cultural composition of football teams and team success. Moreover, the moderating influence of the coach’s intercultural experience was analyzed. In the first step, the existing empirical studies of multicultural football
teams were examined, and the most important variables in this context were identified. Afterwards, a structure–leadership–performance model was developed and tested against archival data of 2483 players of 98 clubs in the five largest European football leagues. While previous research is often restricted to one national league, we examined the composition of football teams across countries, thus presenting a broader and more reliable picture of the effects of cultural diversity in this area. In contrast to many other studies of multicultural teams, we analyzed real-life teams that are characterized by a relatively stable composition over a longer period of time.

Our findings reveal that cultural diversity has a negative effect on team success, thus supporting the similarity–attraction theory, in contrast to previous studies which showed that cultural diversity has either no impact (Brandes et al., 2009; Fritz, 2006; Gaede et al., 2002; Teichmann, 2007) or a positive impact (Andresen and Altmann, 2006; Wulf and Hungenberg, 2006) on the sporting success of football teams. The consideration of relative team performance measures (PMVR) reveals that culturally heterogeneous teams are less successful than teams that consist of players with the same nationality. This result is robust for different measures of cultural diversity. Thus, our study confirms the results of the general literature on multicultural teams that cultural diversity is detrimental for tasks with low complexity and greater time constraints (e.g. Cox et al., 1991; Jehn, 1995; McLeod et al., 1996; Pelled et al., 1999). This is obviously characteristic of football teams, as two famous statements of the former German national coach Sepp Herberger illustrate, “The round thing must go in the rectangular thing” and “The ball is round and the match lasts 90 minutes.”

Another important theoretical contribution is related to the role of coaches. Our study reveals a negative effect of a coach’s intercultural experience in terms of foreign assignments and the sporting success of the team. Obviously, knowledge in the area of football is deeply culturally embedded and may not be transferred to other cultural contexts (e.g. Berman et al., 2002: 27). Thus, our study contributes to research on international knowledge transfers through expatriates (Hébert et al., 2005; Riusala and Suutari, 2004) by examining the conditions and limits of their use. In particular, we show that knowledge that has been acquired in one country cannot be transferred directly to other cultural contexts but has to be adapted to the specific local conditions. This also has consequences for expatriate selection and the design of intercultural training programs.

An important managerial contribution refers to the relationship between financial and sporting success. Using a relative measure of team performance (PMVR), we show which factors other than the market value influence a football team’s sporting success. Previous studies revealed a strong correlation between financial strength and sporting success of a team, that is, greater financial resources enable higher transfer investments into the team and the coaching staff (Gaede et al., 2002: 228; Teichmann, 2007: 349). However, similar to business companies, most FCs face severe financial constraints. Our study indicates that managers who would like to increase the marginal value of their investment in football players should employ culturally homogeneous team members. For example, they may develop talented players in their own youth academies, such as in the famous and successful examples of Barcelona’s La Masia (Farmhouse) or Amsterdam’s Ajax Academy, and gradually include them in their professional team.

When managers decide to recruit foreign players, for example, for financial or merchandising reasons, they should be aware of the great need of cultural integration. Intercultural training may help players from foreign countries to adjust to the new context more easily. Surprisingly, anecdotal evidence shows that FCs do not seem to put much emphasis on this important aspect. For example, the Japanese Takashi Inui who joined Eintracht Frankfurt in 2012 mentioned in an interview with the German weekly Kicker:
I can’t speak English at all, I understand some German but find it hard to communicate (...). When I played for Bochum, Kagawa [at that time playing for the neighboring team of Borussia Dortmund] and I often went to German classes together. Recently, however, I did not have this opportunity and I don’t have a teacher anymore (...). I don’t understand everything because of the language barrier (...). Misunderstandings always happen from time to time. (cited in Ebert and Dämpfling, 2012)

Some limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting and generalizing the study’s results. One restriction is the measurement of the coach’s intercultural experience. The number of coaches who have worked in different countries is still small. In all, 84 percent of the analyzed coaches have been employed in the same country for the past 5 years and only 23 percent are foreigners. Instead of investigating whether coaches have worked abroad, standardized questionnaires about their intercultural experience could be used that offer a more detailed picture of their intercultural and language skills. For example, it is surprising that foreign coaches in the English Premier League are mainly from countries in the United Kingdom (Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales) with the notable exception of several top clubs, such as Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, and Manchester City, which have a tradition for coaches from Romance countries. Coaches in the Spanish Primera División are often from other Spanish-speaking countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, or neighboring Portugal, while in Germany, foreign coaches come mostly from other German-speaking countries such as Switzerland or culturally similar neighboring countries such as the Netherlands. Thus, it would be interesting to analyze whether this cultural similarity has a positive effect or whether individual attributes (e.g. education, psychographic characteristics, leadership style, etc) are more relevant, which is probably the case in the three top English clubs mentioned above.

Another limitation is the removal of some players from the sample because they were not assigned any values in Hofstede’s study. This mainly includes players from Africa, such as Senegal or Mali. For these players, a great cultural distance from their teammates can be expected. In addition, the sample contains some players who are foreigners according to their passports but have been living and playing football in the respective country for many years. For example, Lionel Messi is Argentinian but has spent his entire football career in Barcelona (Spain). On the contrary, several members of the French 1998 World Cup winning team originate from African and Caribbean countries, while they all have a French passport. Thus, the individual cultural values of these players may differ significantly from the respective country scores adapted from Hofstede. The same applies to players with dual citizenship. Future research should measure cultural values on an individual level and should also consider interaction processes within teams. Standardized questionnaires could be used to examine variables such as team tenure, the process of trust building, team cohesion, and the building of subgroups that consist of players with the same cultural background. It would also be interesting to learn more about team activities outside the football ground, such as private relations, language courses or psychological help, and how these activities support the acculturation of foreign players and in turn their performance. Moreover, the role of bicultural individuals as boundary spanners between different cultural subgroups within a team may be analyzed (e.g. Brannen and Thomas, 2010: 11).

Another promising direction for future research would be to have a closer look on the impact of language on team processes and sporting success (e.g. Chen et al., 2006; Henderson, 2005). Football requires intensive communication between the team members on the field as well as by the coach. Thus, it can be expected that language skills of players and coaches may moderate the relationship between the cultural diversity of a team and team success in a positive way. For example, Barcelona
FC, one of the most successful FCs of the last 10 years, recruits mostly foreign players from other Spanish-speaking countries, such as Argentina, Chile, or Mexico, who thus may not face significant language problems.

Finally, it could be interesting to extend the study to consider the success of football teams in international competitions, such as the UEFA Champions League or Europa League. These leagues are not only attractive from a financial perspective but also regarded as more prestigious than national championships. In particular, top clubs, such as Barcelona FC, Real Madrid, Manchester United, or FC Bayern Munich, may therefore put more emphasis on their performance in European club-level competitions than in their national leagues. Last but not the least, this would also allow comparison of the results of football squads with multicultural teams in other environments, which are also often faced with the challenges of international competition.

**Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**References**


