



Jürgen Klopp:

The importance of a culture of respect to success in football

This case study is for the purposes of education only and does not suggest any good or bad practice on the part of anyone mentioned in the case study.



Jurgen Klopp (Source: Tim.Reckmann, Wikimedia Commons)

Neil Doncaster

University of Liverpool

ABSTRACT

This case study looks at the role of the leader in football. The study briefly reviews the academic literature on the subject of leadership and focuses on the example of Jürgen Klopp, the manager of English Premier League club Liverpool FC.

The case study looks at Jürgen Klopp's background, career and track record in football management and seeks better to understand the impact of his leadership style on the success on Liverpool FC.

The objective of this study is to create a better understanding of leadership in football and to provoke discussion about the difference that leaders in football can make to the performance of organizations.

Based on the case's discussion of the importance of vision and shared values to Jürgen Klopp's leadership style, the case also contextualizes to clubs in the MENA region in considering the values, which are important for successful leadership in the region.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Management research suggests that leaders have “a possible crucial impact on the organizations they head” (Berkeley Thomas 1988).¹ As Goodall, Kahn and Oswald (2008)² put it: “Leaders matter. Little is known, however, about why some leaders are successful and others are not.”

In fact, evidence on whether leaders make a difference to the performance of organizations is divided.

There are two different schools of thought (Bridgewater 2010)³:

1. Alan Berkeley Thomas, “Does Leadership make a difference in Organizational Performance?,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33 (1988): 388 – 400.

2. Amanda H. Goodall, Lawrence M. Kahn, Andrew J. Oswald “Why do Leaders Matter?: The Role of Expert Knowledge,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 77, No:3 (2011): 265-284.

3. Sue Bridgewater, “Life in the Fast Lane,” in *Football Management*, Basingstoke (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 19-56.

Individualistic – which argues that leaders influence the performance of organizations; and

Contextual – which believes that performance of organizations is determined by the availability of resources and other characteristics of the organization, rather than by those of the leader.

The Individualistic school of thought

This viewpoint often begins with definitions of what leadership is:

“Leaders help to define reality for others; they interpret actions, giving meaning and perspective to events.” (Morley 1984: 269)⁴

“Leadership is to do with forging the meanings which forge the bedrock of organizational culture.” (Peters and Waterman 1982: 75)⁵

There is also a recognition that effective leadership is not just about the power and influence of the leader, but about the motivation of the individuals who work in the organization. The importance of “followers” is seen in definitions by authors such as Bryman (1986)⁶ who argues that:

“Leadership involves a sensitivity to the needs and values which implies that it is not simply a case of doing things to followers.” (Bryman 1986: 193)

and that of Burns (1978)⁷ who says that:

“I define leadership as a leader inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the values and expectations - of both leaders and followers.” (Burns 1978: 19)

4. Ian Morley, “On Imagery and the Cycling of Decision-making,” In James G. Hunt, Dian-Marie Hosking, Chester A. Schriesheim & Rosemary Stewart Eds., *Leaders and Managers: International Perspectives on Managerial Behaviours*, Oxford (NATO Scientific Affairs, 1984), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/C2013-0-03731-0>.

5. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best run Companies*, New York (Harper Row, 1982).

6. Alan Bryman, “Leadership in Organizations,” In S. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. Nord Eds., *Handbook of Organization Studies*, London (Sage, 1986).

7. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, New York (Harper Row, 1978).

From the 1980s onwards, one of the key strands of research in the individualistic view of leadership has been that which looks at “transformational” or “visionary” leadership. Stimulated by work such as that of Peters and Waterman “In Search of Excellence,” leadership was seen as something which:

“Stirred people’s emotions and encouraged them to think about possibilities and achievements which would not otherwise have occurred to them.” (Bryman 1989: 37)⁸

Transformational leadership believes that successful leaders have clear visions for the direction in which their organization should go. They pursue this direction with certainty and instil confidence in those around them (Bridgewater 2010)⁹.

The Contextual school of thought

In contrast, contextual studies look more at the resources and capabilities of the organization, believing that these, rather than the attributes and visions of individual leaders, determine the success of performance (Lieberman and O’Connor 1972)¹⁰.

Whilst critics have pointed to flaws in Lieberman and O’Connor’s original study, this school of thought has resulted in a greater consideration of the context of the organization in determining effective leadership style. For example, research such as that of Leavy and Wilson (1994)¹¹ and Ward (2003)¹² identifies different organizational contexts which might pose different challenges for the leader:

8. Alan Bryman, “Leadership and Culture in Organization,” *Public Money and Management* (1989): 35 – 41.

9. Bridgewater, “Life in the Fast Lane.”

10. Stanley Lieberman and James F. O’Connor, “Leadership and Organizational Performance: A Study of Large Corporations,” *American Sociological Review* 37 (1972): 117 – 30.

11. Brian Leavy and David Wilson, *Strategy and Leadership*, London (Routledge, 1994).

12. Andrew Ward, *The Leadership Lifecycle: Matching Leaders to Evolving Organizations*, Basingstoke (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Builder – leading something from the beginning from the early stages of development

Revitalizer – re-energizing in an organization which has lost momentum

Turnarounder – involved in major changes in several parts of an organization where several things are going wrong

Inheritor – takes over leadership of a successful organization and has to continue momentum using own style

What is leadership in football?

In many ways, football clubs and governing bodies are organizations like any other, with goals, resources, challenges, visions, contexts.

There are, however, some specific challenges of leading in a football environment:

High visibility – the high level of media interest in football makes the role of a leader in football one in which every move, every decision, can be scrutinized, replayed and debated. This may also be true of other types of leadership context, but the passionate, emotional connection of fans and other stakeholders with sport means that the scrutiny and potential criticism of leaders in football is especially high.

Results oriented – football is judged by win / draw / loss, by points on a league table, success in knock-out competitions. Again, being judged on results is not different to other organizations, but the ease of looking at football results means that softer measures of success, such as developing talented younger players, building an effective culture in a club, can be overlooked. Research such as that of Kuper and Szymanski (2009)¹³ also argues for the importance of contextual factors, such as quality of players / player wages, in determining the level of results in football, rather than the actions of individual leaders.

13. Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanski, *Why England Lose: and other Curious Phenomena Explained*, London (Harper Collins, 2009).

Short-termism – perhaps as a result of the focus on success on the pitch, there is a rapid turnover of football leaders. This can make it difficult to create a winning culture, as a succession of leaders might each prefer different players, different styles of play, change football coaching and other staff and adopt different leadership styles.

High pressured – whilst any high profile leadership role may be pressurised, the above factors and the intensity of the number of match days for a football leader mean that physical and psychological resilience, the ability both to believe in and retain confidence in a vision and to bounce back from setbacks in achieving it are key attributes of football leadership.

Organizational Culture

There are a number of different definitions of organizational culture although these tend to have some common elements, such as underlying values, common goals, and shared ways of behaving and interacting that form the social and psychological environment of the organization.

Organizational culture might also include norms, systems, symbols, language and habits (Needle 2004).¹⁴

Put simply, organizational culture is: “the way things are done around here.” (Deal and Kennedy 2000).¹⁵

JÜRGEN KLOPP

Pictures of a smiling Jürgen Klopp are synonymous with the current Liverpool FC football team. His happy and confident demeanour seems at odds with many of the stresses and strains of the reality of managing top-flight English Premier League team.

14. David Needle, *Business in Context: An Introduction to Business and Its Environment* (Cengage Learning EMEA, 2004).

15. Allan A. Kennedy & Terrence E. Deal, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, Harmondsworth (Penguin Books, 1982; reissue Perseus Books, 2000).

Klopp's Liverpool team reached the final of the UEFA Champions League in 2018 and is reckoned to be one of the strongest English Premier League teams at present.

But it wasn't always this way. During season 2016/17, Liverpool endured a difficult period on the pitch, getting knocked out of both domestic cup competitions and winning just once in ten games – effectively ending any hopes they might have had of winning the English Premier League title.

Despite this, there were no murmurings of discontent within the camp; there was no public criticism of his players by Klopp (or vice versa); the team captain called a behind-closed-doors meeting of players to iron out the problems. And on 11 February 2017, Liverpool beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-0, ending the crisis. Liverpool went on to clinch fourth place in the Premier League, thereby qualifying for the UEFA Champions League for season 2017/18 – just the second time in eight years that Liverpool had qualified for UEFA's primary club competition.

Klopp had known about the players-only meeting in advance and given it his full backing. He said:

“It's really important the boys come together and sort a few things for themselves because I can only give advice on the sidelines of the pitch...but they have to take it.”

“In the hard moments, nothing came between us...Absolutely nothing. They have to...be a real group and a real group can meet, talk about it and work on solutions. “Nobody expects perfection. I don't expect it from them and they don't from me. It is full of respect.”¹⁶

Background

Jürgen Norbert Klopp, born 16th June 1967, is a German football manager and former professional player, who is the current manager of English Premier League club Liverpool.

Born in Stuttgart, Klopp started playing for his local football club and then at three Frankfurt clubs. In 1990, Klopp was signed by Mainz 05 and spent eleven years there as a player. Originally a striker, Klopp turned to playing in defence in 1995.

16. James Pearce, “Klopp - what makes Liverpool a powerful force and the rise of player power,” *Liverpool Echo*, 26 February 2017, <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/liverpool-jurgen-klopp-unity-power-12659124>.

Upon his retirement as a player, Klopp was appointed as manager of Mainz 05 in February 2001. He achieved promotion to the Bundesliga 1 in 2004. He remained as manager for seven years, resigning a year after Mainz 05 had been relegated without achieving re-promotion.

In May 2008, Klopp was appointed as manager of Borussia Dortmund. In his first season with Dortmund, he won the German Super Cup and led Dortmund to a 6th place finish. Dortmund won the club's first ever domestic 'double' in 2012, while the club's 81 points achieved in the 2011/12 season was the greatest number of points achieved in the Bundesliga's history at that time.

After winning the Super Cup and finishing second in the Bundesliga in season 2013/14, Klopp announced that he would be leaving Dortmund after the end of the 2014/15 season.

In October 2015, Jürgen Klopp agreed a three-year deal to become the new manager of Liverpool, following the departure of Brendan Rogers.

During his time with Borussia Dortmund, Jürgen Klopp was twice awarded 'German Football Manager of the Year', in 2011 and 2012.

Jürgen Klopp at Liverpool

During his first media conference with Liverpool, Klopp dubbed himself 'The Normal One' as a parody of Jose Mourinho's famous 'The Special One' statement upon taking over at Chelsea in 2004.¹⁷

His debut at Liverpool resulted in a 0-0 away draw to Tottenham Hotspur. After three 1-1 draws in the opening matches of the UEFA Europa League, Liverpool defeated Rubin Kazan 1-0 in Klopp's first win in Europe as manager.

17. Andy Hunter, "Jürgen Klopp, the 'Normal One', takes over as new Liverpool manager," *The Guardian*, 9 October 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/oct/09/jurgen-klopp-liverpool-manager-normal-one>.

In March 2016, Klopp's Liverpool team progressed to the quarter-finals of the UEFA Europa League by defeating Manchester United 3-1 on aggregate. In April 2016, Liverpool beat Klopp's former club Borussia Dortmund 5-4 on aggregate to reach the semi-finals of the UEFA Europa League. A win against Villarreal took Liverpool to the UEFA Europa League final, where they lost 3-1 to Sevilla.

In July 2016, Klopp and his coaching team signed six-year contract extensions. Liverpool qualified for the UEFA Champions League for the first time since 2014/15 by finishing 4th in the Premier League in 2017.

Liverpool reached the 2018 UEFA Champions League final, where they lost 3-1 to Real Madrid.

At the end of October 2018, Liverpool FC sit in top place in the English Premier League.

Jürgen Klopp's media career and endorsements

In 2005, Klopp was a regular expert commentator on German TV network ZDF. He followed that up with work as a match analyst during the 2006 and 2010 World Cups in Germany and South Africa respectively. On both occasions, he received the Deutscher Fernsehpreis for the 'Best Sports Show'.

Jürgen Klopp is a highly popular figure, in Germany, the UK and around the world. He is used in advertisements for the likes of Puma, Opel and the German cooperative banking group Volksbanken-Raiffeisenbanken. According to business publication *Horizont*, Klopp's role as 'brand ambassador' for Opel successfully helped the German car maker to increase sales¹⁸. Geissler (2013) *Wirtschaftswoche*¹⁹ also points to the way in which association

18. "New Car Monitor: Klopp macht sich für Opel bezahlt, *HORIZONT Online* (in German) (website), 28 November 2012, <https://www.horizont.net/marketing/nachrichten/-New-Car-Monitor-Kloppo-macht-sich-fuer-Opel-bezahlt-111632>.

between the car brand and Klopp helped it to change its perception among customers, with greater optimism about its prospects, which could partly be attributed to new car models, such as the Opel Adam, but also to the use of Klopp “a popular figure often seen in the press” and his players from BVB Dortmund talking about Opel cars.

Jürgen Klopp and respect

Klopp is an ambassador for the German anti-racism campaign “*Respekt! Kein Platz für Rassismus*” (“Respect! No Room for Racism.”)²⁰ Along with some of his BVB Dortmund players, Turkish international player, Nuri Sahin and others, Klopp, is amongst other leading figures from football, journalists around the time of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, South Africa on an anti-racism campaign which had its origins in Frankfurt, Germany.

Klopp was involved in a number of “Respekt” initiatives from 2010-2015 including “100 people, 100 stories”²¹ in which 100 famous sports, music and other famous people recount experiences and ways in which everyone can show respect.

A Google search of “Jürgen Klopp respect” throws up a large number of examples where Klopp uses the word “respect” – in relation to players, fans, opposition clubs and elsewhere. It truly appears to be part of his footballing DNA.

His quotes are often self-deprecating – eg “I am ‘The Normal One’. I am a normal guy from the Black Forest. I was a very average player. I don’t compare myself with these genius managers from the past.”

19. Holger Geissler, “Jürgen Klopp reisst Opel aus dem Imagetief,” *Wirtschaftswoche* (in German) (website), September 23, 2013, <https://www.wiwo.de/unternehmen/auto/brandindex-juergen-klopp-reisst-opel-aus-dem-imagetief/8824344.html>.

20. ““Respect - no room for racism" - Nuri Sahin active as a tolerance ambassador,” BVB Dortmund (website), 12 May 2010, Accessed 29 October 2018, <https://www.bvb.de/News/Hintergrund/Respekt-kein-Platz-fuer-Rassismus-Nuri-Sahin-als-Toleranzbotschafter-aktiv>.

21. “Jürgen Klopp,” Respect.TV (website), 27 January 27, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160326131208/http://respekt.tv/kommunikation/aus-der-redaktion/interviews/juergen-klopp->respekt-100-menschen-100-geschichten>.

Jürgen Klopp appears to have achieved an unlikely combination of broad popularity, managerial success and commercial success, while remaining grounded and modest.

Jürgen Klopp and Leadership

In his biography of Jürgen Klopp, Raphael Honigstein²² points to the fact that Jürgen Klopp combines a clear vision as a coach which led him to great success at BVB Dortmund - and has gone on to gain him success at Liverpool FC - with a super-size personality and “all or nothing style of football and management:”

'I like the total intensification, when there are crashes and bangs everywhere, pure adrenaline and no one being able to breathe'

Honigstein describes Klopp as being: “*He’s authentic, approachable and funny, charming media and fans alike. He’s also merciless and exceptionally driven, his quick temper bubbling away barely under the surface.*”

According to a study by Prof Jens Rowold and Dr Kai Borman²³, Klopp not only led his team to shared vision of how much they would enjoy successful sporting moments, but also helped to develop individual young players who were “hungry for success:”

“He is an extremely good motivator who can convey charismatic visions (...) and he lives the passion that he expects from his players.”

LEADERSHIP, QNB STARS LEAGUE AND QATAR

The core values of the Qatar national teams are honour, loyalty, respect and victory. Examples of transformational leadership, such as that of Jürgen Klopp in which a leader creates and shares a vision and an organizational culture, can be found among leaders around the world. The context and the nature of those values might vary, but the communication of

22. Raphael Honigstein, *Klopp: Bring the Noise* (ISBN: 9780224100748, 2017).

23. “Lead à la Jürgen Klopp: With visions of success,” Technical University of Dortmund, <http://www.zhb.tu-dortmund.de/zhb/Row/Medienpool/Downloads/Fuehren-a-la-Juergen-Klopp-Studie.pdf>.

values which can unite organizations and teams is a feature of successful leadership and of organizational culture.

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Based on the case's discussion of the importance of vision and shared values to Jürgen Klopp's leadership style, the case also leads to consideration of the question of which values and visions, and what leadership style, would be most effective for successful leadership in Qatar and within the MENA region?

Case Study Questions

1. What attributes of Jürgen Klopp make him attractive to brands such as Puma and Opel and to campaigns such as “Respekt! Kein Platz für Rassismus”? How do such brands and campaigns use Klopp in their messaging and advertising?
2. To what extent do you believe that Klopp can be credited with the success of the clubs he has led, rather than other context factors of the particular clubs he has managed?
3. Which managers and coaches in the QNB Stars League particularly demonstrate the value of “respect”?
4. Other than “respect”, which positive values are associated with particular football managers in the QNB Stars League?

Appendices

Appendix 1

Jürgen Klopp Managerial Statistics:

Team	From	To	Win %
Mainz	27 February 2001	30 June 2008	40.4%
Borussia Dortmund	1 July 2008	30 June 2015	56.3%
Liverpool	8 October 2015	Present	53.6%

Appendix 2

Klopp Opel Advert



Appendix 3 – Jürgen Klopp Respekt



Teaching Note

1. The questions in this case study cover two main issues. First, Jürgen Klopp, the attributes of his leadership style and the role that he, rather than contextual factors, play in achieving success at the clubs he leads.
2. Second, the role of the leader and of organizational culture in achieving success and what we can learn about these by considering examples of successful leaders and organizational cultures in QNB clubs and in the broader MENA context.

Focussing on the first of these, the case study looks at some of the characteristics of Jürgen Klopp as leader and of an approach to leadership that he has used across a number of clubs.

In Question 1, students might identify some of these characteristic of Klopp and of the values which are associated with him, such his Respekt campaign or “Normal guy” quotes. They might also discuss the values of particular organizations such as Puma or Opal and the fit between these and the values associated with Klopp. Students are encouraged to go beyond the case study and to research some of the campaigns which have used Klopp.

In Question 2, students are encouraged to think about individualistic and contextual views of leadership theory and to discuss the extent to which Klopp as a “visionary” or “transformational” leader has contributed to his above average win % (See Appendix 1). Students might also consider contextual factors of the particular clubs, such as the quality of players, relative wage bill, leagues in which Mainz, BVB Dortmund and Liverpool FC played, such which might

For the second element of the case study, consideration of values and leadership style within football in Qatar and the MENA region, Question 3 moves on to focus on Jürgen Klopp’s association with the “respect” campaign in Germany. This campaign was applied in a number of contexts, such as showing respect to football officials, and respecting diversity in anti-racism campaigns, but has at its heart showing respect for those around you. Students are asked to consider the fit of this campaign and to identify examples of leaders who might fit with the respect values.

Given that this is one value which has been seen in the approach of Jürgen Klopp, but it might not be the most important value in other social and cultural contexts, Question 4 of the case study then gives students the opportunity to identify shared values which they can identify with particular clubs within QNB Stars League and football in Qatar.

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