The Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise: Achieving Optimal Team Performance in MotoGP

Barbara J. Stanford, Ed.D.
Independent Researcher

Abstract

Within the highly competitive and technical world of international professional motorcycle racing, the aim is optimal on-track performance. Successful attainment of that objective lies in the formation of an expert team in which members bring their individual skills, knowledge, and experience to bear in ways that benefit the group as a whole and achieve intended outcomes. This ethnographic study explores how members of a factory MotoGP team, Team Vinco (a pseudonym), coordinate their efforts and pool their collective expertise within a unique working environment to effectively function as a unit despite intense time pressure, rapidly changing scenarios, and stressful decision-making conditions. Findings are framed by a set of specific competencies I refer to as The Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise (Preparation, Partnership, Professionalism, Positivity, Persistence, Productivity, and Passion), and lend credence to the notion that individuals who engage in physical and cognitive collaboration often outperform individuals who operate independently. The ethnographic narrative is deeply rooted in my informants' native point of view (Malinowski, 1922), and reflects their cultural language and experience. This study lays the groundwork for future examinations of expert teams within and outside of professional motorcycle racing.

Keywords
Motorcycling, Motorcycle racing, MotoGP, motorsport, Teamwork, Expert Teams, Workplace Expertise, Ethnography, Organizational Theory

Introduction

As the sun tilts in the sky above Circuit of the Americas, the world's top 22 motorcycle racers hunch over their handlebars, eyes riveted on the track ahead, bodies poised to rocket forward the moment the green flag waves. A short distance away, in pit boxes up and down pit lane, mechanics stack their tools and say their prayers. Electronics engineers cross their fingers and anxiously scan the data one last time, hoping they have not overlooked even the tiniest detail. As the riders surge forward, those in the boxes huddle before a wide bank of TV screens, holding their collective breath, faces tense yet resigned. They have done all they can. Their riders' performance and the eventual race outcome are out of their hands.

MotoGP is the pinnacle of motorcycle road racing with purpose-built, money-is-no-object, cutting-edge machinery piloted by "professional nutcases, daredevils and racing heroes"

(Davidson, 2016, n.p.) topping 200 miles per hour and always looking for just a bit more speed (Davidson, 2016, n.p.; McLaren, 2018; Wood, 2017, n.p.). This international sporting extravaganza visits 20 circuits in 17 countries across five continents each season, entertaining roughly 2.85 million spectators during 20 race weekends. Each MotoGP circuit is unique in layout, surface composition, physical characteristics, and distance, all factors which affect bike performance and drive much of the development work teams engage in. A truly global phenomenon, MotoGP reached a television audience of more than 400 million viewers worldwide in 2023 (TotalEnergies, 2023), and generates an estimated 2.55 million dollars in revenue annually (Net Worth Spot, 2024). With 15.9 million Instagram followers, 14.2 million Facebook followers, 6.32 million YouTube subscribers, and 3.2 million Twitter subscribers, MotoGP commands a significant social media presence (Feedspot, 2024; MotoGP, n.d.a; MotoGP, n.d.b).

Although the riders are front and center and serve as the primary draw for the hordes of fans crowding the stands and watching from home, without the team managers, crew chiefs, mechanics, data technicians, tire specialists, logistics coordinators, and other members of these expert teams, there would be no show. Each member of a MotoGP team has a specific area of expertise, and long before the bikes assemble on the grid at the start of each race, these behind-the-scenes skilled professionals have done much of the heavy lifting. With technology advancing at breakneck speed and mere thousandths of seconds separating riders on track, it is crucial that they perform their specialized tasks at optimal level. Whether working remotely between races or buried deep inside the team garage over a race weekend, they invest their blood, sweat, and tears for one reason and one reason only—to build a motorcycle that can outperform all others on track.

Situating the study

Within professional motorcycle racing, the key to success lies in the formation of an expert team in which individuals bring their own skills, thought processes, and areas of expertise to bear in ways that benefit the overall effort and achieve intended outcomes. Members of expert teams are often visionary and intrinsically motivated, and possess a sense of commitment based on values and goals (Abfalter, 2013, p. 296; Tancig, 2009, p. 109). Knowledge, ability, and practice combine with situational awareness to enable members to perform effectively despite severe time pressure, rapidly changing scenarios and contexts, and stressful decision-making tasks (Abfalter, 2013; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993; Eccles & Tenenbaum, 2004; Salas et al., 2000). There is often an aura of glamour and mystery surrounding high-performance teams, within which collective expertise is crucial and ineffective performance can have disastrous consequences (Abfalter, 2013, Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993; Koivunen, 2009). These teams can be difficult for researchers to access, as they generally operate within insular environments limited to a tight circle of intimate insiders. Such is the case with MotoGP and, until now, its unique team structure has not been the subject of focused ethnographic examination. With a former world champion serving as my gatekeeper, I was permitted entry into a MotoGP factory team (hereafter referred to as Team Vinco, a pseudonym) for the purpose of learning how its members coordinate their activities and efforts in order to effectively function as a unit and achieve successful outcomes. My findings are presented within a framework I developed and refer to as the Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise. This framework categorizes and explores specific competencies collectively exhibited by members of Team Vinco, coalescing at the intersection of ethnography and organizational theory, and resulting in optimal performance.

Methodology

Ethnography is more than "a process of going out and finding facts lying around in the world, dusting them off, and bringing them home to inform, educate, and delight" (Dourish, 2007, p. 3). Rather, it requires immersion into a particular culture or community, a desire to discover what really happens in the everyday lives and experiences of informants, and the effective translation of observations and experiences into meaningful context through rich, convincing narrative (Jayathilaka, 2021; Marcus, 2006; Yanow et al., 2012). On the part of the ethnographer, this entails long-term, dedicated study of a specific population, as opposed to "flying in and out of the field for a brief, tourist-like visit" (Yanow et al., 2012, p. 3). In my case, I was admitted into the inner sanctum of Team Vinco where I spent more than 200 hours across a two-year period, spanning five race weekends, four countries, and two continents. During that time, I interviewed every willing team member, often repeatedly; took copious notes while in the field; followed up with informants to ensure that my inferences and conclusions about their lived experiences were correct; and provided them with the opportunity to member-check my written findings upon completion.

The organization of my study and presentation of my findings were guided by pioneering ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski's three aims of ethnographic fieldwork (as cited in O'Reilly, 2012, n.p.):

1. To describe the customs and traditions, the institutions, the structure, the skeleton of the tribe (or what people say they do)
2. To give this flesh and blood by describing how daily life is actually carried out (how they do it)
3. To record typical ways of thinking and feeling associated with the institutions and culture.

Building on this foundation, I sought to understand how my informants organized their behavior and made order out of activities that, in many cases, were completely foreign to me (Tyler, 1969, p. 6), and discover what they had to know as members of a particular cultural community (Goodenough, 1970, 110-111)—in this case, MotoGP. Spradley and McCurdy's (1972) emphasis on the insider's point of view—specifically, as a means of learning from my informants—enabled me to view culture as knowledge, and base my observations, interpretations, and descriptions on criteria employed by my informants in reference to their own personal experience (p. 9-11, 18) across varied sites and contexts (Marcus, 2011; Leslie et al., 2014). Van Maanen's (1979) ethnographic research guided me in "uncover[ing] and explicat[ing] the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation" (p. 540), and Clifford (1983) and Wolcott's (2008) emphasis on transforming ethnographic data through careful cultural analysis and interpretation enabled me to produce an authoritative written account. I drew heavily upon the actual words of my informants and included direct quotes whenever possible in the presentation of my findings in order to "stay close to the data as originally recorded…so that informants themselves seem to tell their stories" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 10). I made every effort to confront and mitigate real or perceived obstacles "by using appropriate contextual cues in order to make legitimate inferences and understand observed behavior" (Trueba, 2013, p. 21). As both researcher and data collection tool, I operated from a stance of suspended judgment and engaged in ongoing critical reflection of my own biases in order to prevent my personal beliefs and assumptions from clouding or skewing the collection and analysis of the research data.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Theory served as a frame for this study. Situated at the confluence of sociology (e.g. Blau, 1957; Bourdieu, 1977; Durkheim, 1893/1984; Merton, 1940; Weber, 1957), economics (e.g. Berle & Means, 1932; Coase, 1937; Forrester & Adams, 1997; Marshall, 1919), and organizational management (e.g. Barnard, 1938; March & Simon, 1958/1993; Payne & Leiter, 2013; Simon, 1944), organizational theory serves as a toolkit for better understanding institutional structures, dynamics, and meaning systems, and provides explanations for complex interactions within organizations (Birken et al., 2023; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Van Maanen, 1979). In short, it serves as "a window through which to view the behavior [and interactions] of individuals and groups…[with]in the context of a complex organization" (Kuh, 2003, p. 270). The primary intent is to "define, explain and analyze organizations and organizational relations" (Ilhan, 2020, p. 81), and it "is concerned with how the internal organizational structure works to motivate participants and produce outcomes consistent with [established] goals" (Fligstein, 2001, p. 4). Organizational theory is "not a homogenous science" (Scott, 1961, p. 8); rather, it "inhabits diverse and complex environments" (Starbuck, 2003, p. 176) and offers a multidisciplinary approach that is both analytical and prescriptive (Fligstein, 2001; Ilhan, 2020). Within expert teams, this marriage between theory and experience results in a type of theory-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1978) that "leads to improved organizational effectiveness and efficiency" (Kuh, 2003, p. 271). Examining Team Vinco through the lens of organizational theory enabled me, as the researcher, to better understand how members of a specific expert team manage and execute routine activities and meaning-making processes within the MotoGP workplace context.

Setting the Scene

The unique 30,000 square meter traveling MotoGP paddock serves as temporary home to more than 3,000 people from around the globe. Veteran MotoGP television commentator, Matt Birt (2018), described the paddock as an "incredibly close-knit family" (n.p.) with people from all walks of life who share a passion for "the greatest motorsport show on earth" (n.p.). Each MotoGP race weekend spans a three-day period, Friday through Sunday, and includes three practice sessions, two qualification sessions, a half-distance sprint race, and a full-length main race. Within the MotoGP paddock, there are two types of race teams: factory teams and satellite teams, each supporting two riders. Generally speaking, factory teams are huge entities directly funded and managed by the bike manufacturers, and across which competition is fierce. Each factory has vast resources and strives to develop exceptional technology and engineering for the primary purpose of introducing the best product to the consumer market. What is at stake— billions in revenue and millions of unit sales globally—reaches far beyond mere MotoGP wins or championships. Satellite teams operate independently and purchase or lease their bikes from the factories. They often play an important role in the development process as well.

Team Vinco, the team at the center of this study, is a multicultural, multilingual factory team with two riders (referred to here as #18 and #22, pseudonyms) who ride identical motorcycles equipped with the latest technology and parts, and who receive full factory support. Team Vinco can best be described as two teams within one larger team, with each crew or side of the garage dedicated to a single rider. Each rider has a crew chief, a designated electronics engineer, a chief mechanic, two additional mechanics, a tire specialist, and a suspension specialist whose sole focus is the on-track performance of the rider and the bike. Under the larger factory umbrella, Team

Vinco also has a team manager, a project leader, a technical manager, additional engineers and technicians, a parts manager, various logistical coordinators, a marketing and communications department, and a hospitality crew, all of whom served as informants during my research. Given the limited scope of this article, however, I will focus on 12 specific team members. They hail from five different countries and speak multiple languages. All speak English, but not as their primary language. Due to the high-stakes environment of MotoGP and the confidential nature of the work carried out inside the garage, I have assigned pseudonyms to these informants as follows:

Axel: pseudonym for Team Vinco chief mechanic for the #22 rider
Daniel: pseudonym for Team Vinco engineer and performance group leader
Gabe: pseudonym for Team Vinco logistical coordinator
Giorgia: pseudonym for Team Vinco engineer
Julian: pseudonym for Team Vinco team manager
Pietro: pseudonym for Team Vinco engineer
Quentin: pseudonym for Team Vinco crew chief for the #18 rider
Ruben: pseudonym for Team Vinco marketing and communications manager
Sam: pseudonym for Team Vinco chief mechanic for the #18 rider
Sean: pseudonym for Team Vinco dedicated electronics engineer for the #22 rider
Silvester: pseudonym for Team Vinco engineer
Wali: pseudonym for Team Vinco technical manager

The Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise

Membership in a MotoGP team is a dream come true for the fortunate few awarded this highly coveted vocational opportunity. Along with the resultant prestige, however, those employed inside professional motorcycle racing's elite class experience significant performance-related pressures as they strive to function effectively and interdependently in their quest to achieve successful outcomes. In the case of Team Vinco, members demonstrated a specific set of competencies and workplace practices that facilitated optimal performance inside the garage and on the track. These Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise include Preparation, Partnership, Professionalism, Positivity, Persistence, Productivity, and Passion, as outlined in Table 1.

Preparation

Within a MotoGP team, a single moment of carelessness or inattention, or the slightest failure to properly prepare, can have far-reaching consequences. At best, it can result in technical breakdowns or poor race performance; at worst, it can lead to injury or death. Each time a rider climbs onto his bike and exits the garage, he must do so with supreme confidence that his team has properly prepared the motorcycle. There are three primary areas in which preparation is crucial: roles, routines, and checks and balances.

Roles

Initial preparation is set into motion by the team manager, who ensures that personnel hired for particular roles within Team Vinco possess the necessary expertise. Once that component is in place, steps are taken to ensure that team members are fully aware of the responsibilities and obligations related to their roles. These norms are initially established at the beginning of the season and are overseen by a designated coordinator within each tier of operation. For example, the team manager oversees preparation of the crew chiefs for their roles, the crew chiefs then oversee preparation of the chief mechanics who, in turn, prepare the mechanics under their direction. This process flows from one race

Table 1. The Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise

Preparation	The process by which a state of operational and competitive readiness is achieved; comprised of *roles*, *routines*, and *checks and balances*
Partnership	A healthy and mutually beneficial collaborative relationship between members of a team rooted in *cooperation* and *open dialogue*
Professionalism	The competent, efficient, and ethical execution of duties, characterized by *adaptability* and *operating within clear boundaries*
Positivity	The ability to maintain an optimistic outlook through *intentionality*, the *establishment of realistic goals*, and *celebration of small successes*
Persistence	A determined *pursuit of technological advantages*, and/or *perseverance* in the face of difficulty or poor performance
Productivity	Positive output resulting from *a shared vision*, *elimination of distractions*, and *proper time management*
Passion	Strong intrinsic force that produces high levels of satisfaction and motivation

season to the next rather than starting over from point zero each time. The level of preparation required depends on personnel turnover, changes mandated by the factory or the MotoGP governing body, and mechanical or technological advancements or adaptations that are made. If a new member joins the team or a new approach to the job is implemented or a new tool is introduced into the scenario, preparation begins or continues accordingly.

Julian, the team manager, explained that initial preparation related to roles within the team took about a year and a half. At the three-year mark, when I entered the team garage, 80 to 90 percent of the original group remained intact, and roles were well established. Those who subsequently joined the team were mentored according to the process described above. Every role is important, and proper preparation for the execution of that role is of equal importance. As Sean, the #22 electronics engineer, stated, "If the weakest link fails, you don't have success. So, there is no crew chief, no manager, no tire guy who is most important."

Routines

Ruben, Team Vinco's marketing and communications manager, described the entire race weekend as "all about routines." Each role within the team is accompanied by particular routines and responsibilities, which enable team members to operate in an efficient, effective manner. Assigning very specific duties to each person ensures that everyone is on the same page at all times. For example, the same mechanic always assembles and disassembles the gearboxes. Likewise, one specific mechanic for each side of the box installs and uninstalls the gearboxes on the bikes, and a designated member

of the team always catches the bike[1] upon its return to the garage. Silvester, one of the team's electronics engineers, referred to this simply as "doing our normal jobs."

An earlier routine begins with the arrival at the circuit of the transport trucks and the logistics team prior to the start of each race weekend. The task of these logistical forerunners is to erect the hospitality unit and begin building the team's assigned pit box. When the rest of the team arrives, established routines facilitate the assembly and organization of the garage and all necessary tools and technologies. As Axel, the #22 chief mechanic, explained, "We begin with a bare frame and install everything inside the box—walls, carpet, lights, desks and workspaces, computer cables and connectors—everything." There is a cyclical element to the process, with the dismantling of the garage at the close of the race weekend following almost exactly the same procedure as the setup, but in reverse. Proper placement of every item in the shipping crates and transport trucks is crucial in facilitating setup and minimizing difficulties at the next track.

Specific routines and procedures guide the work of the mechanics and engineers from the moment they arrive at the track. Axel provided a general outline of the initial process: 1) preparation of all bike components by the parts manager; 2) cleaning, inspection, and organization of those parts by the mechanics; 3) meetings to present and discuss the plan for the weekend; and, finally, 4) assembly of the bikes. The aforementioned plan for the weekend originates with Wali, the technical manager, who formulates a workbook prior to each race. This plan serves as a starting point for the work, with adjustments being made daily by crew chiefs, engineers, suspension specialists and others, who then report back to Wali.

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[1] This refers to grasping the handlebars and stopping the motorcycle as the rider coasts into the garage and dismounts.

Another crucial component of preparation through routines is the formulation and distribution of an informational handbook by Gabe, one of the team logistics coordinators. Prior to every race, Gabe compiles all information pertaining to flights, accommodations, transportation, and daily wardrobe requirements into book format and distributes it to each team member via email and in hard copy format. According to Sam, the #18 chief mechanic, this enables everyone to "work happy" because they know where they should be and what they should be doing at all times.

Checks and Balances

Team Vinco has established a robust system of checks and balances with the goal of preventing costly mistakes. As Sean related to me, "A good system ensures that mistakes are detected before the bike goes out on track. With everyone working together, there is a good chance that we can keep these failures to a minimum."

Three examples of the team's system of checks and balances illustrate the importance of this type of preventative preparation. First, the gearbox, which is an extremely critical bike component, is checked by four different people each time it is installed or uninstalled on the bike. This is part of a stringent mileage control system, which comprises the second preventative measure. More than 200 of the 2,000 parts that make up a race motorcycle are tracked, and the mileage recorded. This routine is completed by no less than three people and is carried out to ensure to the maximum degree possible that reliability is not a factor which negatively impacts bike performance and, therefore, the outcome of the race. Finally, the fuel is weighed after each session by a designated mechanic for

each side of the garage. Silvester then double-checks the numbers to ensure that what is recorded on the report for that session is accurate. This is by no means a comprehensive examination of the preparatory practices of the team but, offers a thumbnail sketch of roles, routines, and checks and balances.

Partnership

"Creation is an act of collaboration. In the context of business, nothing that lasts —nothing of substance and power—was ever built by a single person" (Schwarting, 2018, n.p.). It would be ludicrous to imagine that a single individual could successfully assemble a MotoGP bike, input the proper electronic settings, formulate a race plan, liaise with the rider, assemble and disassemble the garage, and oversee media and marketing activities and guest relations—and repeat that process multiple times each season. While partnership may seem like an obvious necessity within a teamwork environment such as MotoGP, it is also important that such partnerships be healthy and mutually beneficial to all members of the group through cooperation and open dialogue.

Cooperation

Within Team Vinco there is a marked spirit of cooperation between team members, and I noticed that they were quick to assist one another whenever the need arose. Examples of this included stepping in to help roll a mobile screen into place, handing tools to a team member who was unable to reach them, collaborating on the creation of software tools to fill specific needs, and taking on the responsibilities of sick or absent team members. Seeing members of the two sides of the garage interacting, assisting one another, and sharing information was the norm rather than the exception. Sam told me, "Nobody says, 'I'm a mechanic, I only do my job.' We adapt our way of working to help one another."

The electronics engineers interface and work cooperatively to create and improve software tools, with much of their work occurring off-track. Daniel, the performance group leader, explained that he develops tools which are then tested by Sean and Pietro and, if necessary, returned to him for tweaks or changes. "We regularly meet as a group online or in person to define strategies, set priorities, and share ideas and information," he revealed. "This collaborative approach yields better results than individuals working alone." Silvester noted that this general spirit of cooperation across the box resulted in a sense of happiness and camaraderie among team members.

Open dialogue

Another aspect of partnership that enables members of Team Vinco to function cooperatively is open dialogue. This is something that is promoted from the top down. As Julian related to me, "I listen to everybody on the team—from the most experienced expert to the newest mechanic—and learn from their experience." Rather than operating from an authoritarian stance, he prefers to engage in what he referred to as "friendly dialogue—more talking." He admitted that there are potential drawbacks to this approach, but also great benefit: "In some ways it is much more difficult because it takes a long time at the outset, but when it's done, it's done forever." He pointed out that this type of listening and placing equal importance on the input from every member of the team is an effective motivator.

Ruben appreciates Julian's open leadership style and his willingness to dialogue with all members of the team, describing it as "putting himself on the same level as everyone else and treating everyone equally—like a friend." However, he revealed that this approach often

necessitates walking a tightrope of sorts. "Sometimes a manager needs to be tougher, but Julian struggles a bit with that. I understand, though, that his goal is to create a balance and not disrupt the perfect atmosphere of the team."

Open dialogue is characteristic of the team as a whole. For Giorgia, the freedom to speak openly gives her confidence to voice what may be, in her opinion, "stupid" ideas without fear of scorn or derision. "I think that's what really matters. Ours is a difficult job—you don't have everything under control—so, it is important to be accepting of other people's ideas and work together with those ideas." Direct communication and open dialogue between members of the team are critical aspects of quality control as well. In his role as chief mechanic, Axel often speaks directly to the engineers when he notices an issue of concern with the bikes. "If I see, for example, a crack somewhere on the bike, I take some pictures, make a report, and go directly to the chassis engineer to tell him there is a problem." This type of direct verbal interchange enables team members to ensure that they understand one another, which leads to increased cohesion and cooperation. Giorgia explained the benefit of verbal exchange over written communication: "Something written is not always understood correctly; your teammates may misunderstand what you are trying to express, or they may read it in a different tone than you intended." Pietro, concurred: "If you can look someone in the eye when sharing information, you see confirmation there—whether it is good or not. It speeds up the communication process."

Professionalism

Professionalism as a concept is broad and multidimensional, and has been open to various interpretations across time, contexts, and cultures (Cao et al., 2023). Succinctly stated, it can be summarized as carrying out assigned duties responsibly, effectively, and ethically, and always finding ways to be productive (U. S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Two particular areas in which members of Team Vinco demonstrate professionalism are adaptability and operating within clear boundaries.

Adaptability

A central element of professionalism within a group environment is the ability to adapt to circumstances and make proper judgements related to the situation at hand. Members of Team Vinco know that from the time they arrive in the garage and begin preparing the race bike until they pack up their tools and equipment at the conclusion of the race, changes and adjustments will be made, both to the bikes and to their plans and schedules. Daily meetings provide an opportunity to discuss what progress has been made, make and track changes, and ensure that everyone remains on the same page. Wali provided me with insight into what goes on in these closed-doors sessions, as I was never permitted to attend technical meetings. "I check each report and consider everyone's input, the data, and the riders' comments, then discuss with the project manager what our priority should be. Each day we make changes and I send a report to the factory."

Recognizing your position within the hierarchy or organizational structure and adjusting your personal agenda accordingly is an important aspect of adaptability. As Ruben pointed out, "We [members of Team Vinco] are employed by a factory and each of us is a worker." The overall mission, therefore, must take precedence over individual ambition or personal desire. Sam noted that this outlook is part of being a professional. "You cannot always be the leader," he pointed out, "and you cannot think only about yourself. For things to work well, you have to be part of the group and think also of the others."

Clear boundaries

Professionalism affects not only individual team members but the group as a whole, and while at first glance it may appear paradoxical, collaborative organizations such as Team Vinco benefit from the institution of boundaries as they "allow professionals to anticipate other team members' expertise and roles, as well as different aspects of team tasks" (Farchi et al., 2023, p. 277). Organizational leaders often play an important role in setting and managing professional boundaries. Julian recognizes that each member of Team Vinco has a unique professional role to fill and a specific area of responsibility. "Although I play a major role in hiring a crew chief, I do not then tell him what to do from a technical point of view because it's not my territory."

Quentin explained that structure is very important within Team Vinco. The work is divided according to role and responsibility, and each team member offers input within their specific area of expertise. "Every member of the team operates within certain limits," he explained. "We cannot come up with crazy ideas on our own—which we don't, of course. Final decisions are made by specialists in each area—electronics, bike dynamics, tires, and such."

Another aspect of professionalism exhibited by members of Team Vinco is personal-professional boundary management, or the ability to separate fun time from work time, and vice versa (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). This is particularly important as each team is a sort of small family within the larger MotoGP community. Sam reminded me, "We spend more time with each other than with our real families," and Axel added, "It is very simple for us—go to dinner together, enjoy the night, and not always work, work, work." It must be remembered,

however, that work is the central factor that unites them. As Wali pointed out, "We aren't in the paddock to be friends. We are all good friends, but that is not the target." Sean detailed the necessity of being able to focus on the task at hand and also knowing when to walk away. "When you close the garage door [at the end of the race weekend], you have to think about something else. Then, when you get to the next race, refresh your mind and start with as much strength as possible." Ultimately, it is about achieving the proper balance.

Positivity

It is commonly held that positivity begets positivity, and studies have shown that workers who maintain a positive outlook perform better and are better equipped to manage job-related stress and strain than those who do not (Grözinger et al., 2022; Livi et al., 2018). Positivity, however, "is not one-dimensional; positive and negative co-exist as paradoxical forces in tension" (Cunha et al., 2022, p. 16). For teams in highly competitive environments such as MotoGP, where success and failure are often separated by a hair's breadth and the quest for improved performance never ends, it may be a matter of mitigating the negatives rather than eliminating them, while intentionally maintaining a positive outlook.

Intentionality

Members of Team Vinco demonstrated intentional positivity throughout my time in the garage, regardless of the weekend's race results. For example, when neither rider transferred into Q2[2], instead of referring to it as a failure, Julian focused on the fact that the riders' time attacks[3] were positive and the #18 rider had shown great

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[2] The second qualifying session, which sets the first four rows of the starting grid for the sprint race on Saturday and the feature race on Sunday.

[3] A rider's all-out attempt to set the best lap time possible to earn a favorable position in the race lineup.

improvement. Likewise, Wali commented on the noticeable increase in confidence portrayed by the #22 rider, and when the #18 rider crashed out of the race, the technical manager chose to focus on the fact that he was the fastest rider on track during the morning Warm Up, rather than on the crash itself. Team members' comments routinely included such phrases as "a big step in the development process," "a solid race with consistent laps," "we showed our competitiveness," "we are on a positive path," and "we will stay focused and improve even more."

Quentin noted that pulling together as a team and working toward a common goal is crucial. "You have to stay calm even if the situation is not good. You have to pay attention to the job at hand and always stay positive." Sean emphasized the value not only in remaining positive, but also in refraining from outright negativity. "I think you have to avoid, as much as possible, having someone in your team who always thinks in a negative way. This is not an individual sport; every person in the team plays a key role in achieving success." Julian echoed that sentiment: "We are all in the same boat with the same focus; it's a team job."

Wali reminded me that in motorcycle racing, where one wrong move can send the team's hopes straight into the gravel trap, negativity only serves to increase the level of stress and pressure everyone is already under. He prefers to view difficulties as opportunities rather than problems, and focus on the future in a positive way rather than dwelling on the present difficulties. "That's racing, you know. As in normal life, there are moments where it looks like everything is against you, and other times when everything is favorable. Either way, we always need to try to find the positive of that moment."

Setting Realistic Goals and Celebrating Small Victories

Though ascending the top step of the podium is the target for teams and their riders, there can only be one winner in a MotoGP race. The level of competition is incredible, and the odds of putting together the perfect combination of rider and bike and getting them across the finish line first can be formidable. Teams experience highs and lows, and performance waxes and wanes. Though their desire to win is strong, team members recognize that focusing on achieving the best result possible is often more conducive to long-term success. As Sam revealed, "For sure, the target is to be on top, but you have to be realistic and focus on the next step. If you are fifteenth, you cannot start practice and think, 'Ah, today we will be the fastest.'" This involves candidly assessing where they are performance-wise, agreeing upon achievable outcomes, and formulating an incremental plan to arrive at the end goal. "You have to put an objective in front of you, but not too far," Sam explained. "Something you can get to, and from there you have to put another objective." Sean added, "This is racing. You have to make a plan—figure out what the biggest problem is—and then find the right way. Sometimes you go the wrong way, but you keep working." No matter how inconsequential or halting the resultant progress may seem, consistent growth is evidence of forward momentum and provides incentive and motivation for the team to keep trying. Ruben noted, "If you see some improvement, this helps. After all, we are here to try to improve the performance. The atmosphere inside the team exists not because one person is motivated, but because everyone is motivated." Sometimes growth is reflected in terms of mindset rather than immediate on-track results. As Quentin reminded me, "We may wish we could fight for the first three positions when, in reality, we are fighting for tenth, eleventh, twelfth place. Okay. We never give up because we know next time we can do better."

Persistence

The on-track performance differential between top-level teams is slim, and "the level of understanding required to get that last little bit off the lap time [and win races] is very high indeed" (Spalding, 2018, p. 175). As Hall of Fame basketball player, Bill Bradley, put it, "Ambition is the path to success. Persistence is the vehicle you arrive in." For Team Vinco, persistence is a key component in the performance equation. Whether that manifests itself in determined pursuit of technological advantages, or persevering in the face of difficulty when the victories do not come and team morale sags, these professionals keep on keeping on.

Perseverance

Throughout my time inside the MotoGP paddock, various people in various ways told me basically the same thing: In racing, things never go well. The rider always wants to go faster, and the team manager and manufacturer always want a better result. The pressure to improve performance never lets up. Persisting in the face of difficulty, though vital, is seldom easy. According to Julian, "In this job it is very easy to panic. But we know that, in the end, panic is totally useless. The target is clear, which keeps everybody pushing in the same direction." Quentin agreed. "Sometimes things don't go well, but we are here to achieve the best result possible. If this time is a disaster, we will continue to work—not only now, but also for the next race." Sean noted that stress is not always a negative thing and, in fact, can be a positive motivator when viewed as a challenge. Remaining motivated can be difficult, however, when on-track results are less than stellar. "We must be proactive, work together, and daily think of new ways to improve," Ruben told me. "It is not something any one person can do alone." Quentin concurred. "Put it this way, you never

stop. Sometimes it is just a matter of everyone doing their job and waiting until the moment the performance comes back."

MotoGP teams spend long days in the garage, particularly if there is a crashed bike to repair or a mechanical or electronic problem to chase down and fix. Sean described such times as "a fight that involves your mind twenty-four hours a day for four days." During a particularly rough period, performance-wise, Ruben told me, "The people in the team are working really hard, struggling a lot—spending hours and hours and not taking holidays." When I asked Sam how he manages the late nights and early mornings, he responded, "I just have to." Beyond the fact that their livelihoods are dependent upon them showing up at the track, what incentive do team members have for returning race after race after race? For most, it is the excitement of the sport and the prospect of a challenge. As Quentin revealed, "My job is never boring. There are always new problems to solve. Tires behave differently, engines behave differently, circuits are different, and riders need to interpret which is the best way to go fast." Sean added, "It is important to realize that you are not fighting alone. You are fighting with a team., and everybody working together can help you achieve the result you want."

Technological Innovation

The days of "dead simple" race bikes with "three cables, a twist-grip, and a couple of levers and pedals" are long gone (Spalding, 2018, p. 281). Today's MotoGP motorcycles are complex, electronic marvels that move at incredible speeds and generate data at an astonishing rate. Because there is a constant push to increase bike performance and improve race results, team members persistently seek new ways to do their jobs. This regularly involves the development and use of new tools and technologies. Often, this is possible on-site, but sometimes it involves

waiting for a response from the factory, which houses the development side of team operations. Quentin explained, "Sometimes when we have a problem with the bikes, there is a big technical limit and you have to wait until the factory sends the right piece so we can have it here in the track to fix." Other times, members of the team are able to create tools that enable themselves and their colleagues to work more efficiently. For example, Pietro told me about creating a software tool that could easily generate reports from data downloaded from the bikes after each session. He described it as "a collector of data," and explained how it allows him to "create and customize plots from the data in the background." He also created flexible software tools for Giorgia and Silvester when they expressed a need. Likewise, the technological persistence shown by Daniel, as previously discussed, has impacted the way the team works by introducing new processes and innovative technologies.

Teams are heavily dependent upon skilled electronics engineers who sift through piles of information, chasing that elusive one-thousandth of a second advantage over the competition. Their job begins at home and continues throughout the race weekend. The cycle starts afresh for the next race. Silvester's role in achieving the best bike performance possible focuses on improving reliability. He analyzes data from both riders' bikes during the sessions, then conducts deeper analysis afterward. "I am always looking for ways to do things faster, better, more precise," he explained. Giorgia and her counterparts in the performance group are recursively persistent in looking for new and better ways to approach bike setup. As the direct link between the team and the factory, Giorgia submits their ideas for on-track improvement to the off-site developers. Pietro made it clear that he is never satisfied with the level of performance and diligently searches for any hidden advantage that may be buried in the data. He studies the data during each session, and analyses it more deeply afterward. Daniel, too,

combs through the data, searching for that little bit more. "The goal is to reach optimum performance level," he said. "It requires a lot of effort and the process is ongoing. We continue studying the data during the off-season when there is more time to think."

Productivity

Productivity can be defined as "the overall efficiency and output of a given operational system" (Lumen, n.d.). Within Team Vinco, the ultimate level of productivity is realized in the creation of a race motorcycle that handles well, suits each riders' individual riding style, and enables him to gain a meaningful advantage over his rivals on track. There are three factors which were shown to positively impact productivity within Team Vinco: a shared vision, elimination of distractions, and proper time management.

Shared Vision

Within the average organization, productivity may be interpreted differently by management and employees. While productivity at the company level is often quantified in terms of revenue or profit margin, individuals tend to measure their own productivity in terms of how many items they have checked off their proverbial to-do list (Waters, 2023, n.p.). This difference in perspective is much less likely to occur within a MotoGP garage where every member of every team is fully aware of the goal, and the focus is on winning races. Axel described the feeling of kinship that exists between team and rider:

> The whole team feels passionate about the rider. When he races, it is almost like we are on track with him. If he crashes, we feel like we have crashed, too. We are all trying to achieve the same thing, and that is victory. We may not have the same

gift the rider has got, but we're getting as close as possible to that gift—that end result, the win.

In many cases, members of the team really do understand—at least to some extent—what the rider is experiencing, as many ride motorcycles themselves. Some even have racing experience. Wali has long had a passion for motorcycling and got his first bike when he was eleven years old. He reflected on the affinity he feels for the team's on-track hero. "Even though I only raced in the lower classes, I still feel what the rider feels. Most people on the team share this feeling."

While I have referred to this aspect of productivity as shared vision, it could just as easily be labeled vicarious vision, as this sense of actual participation with the rider on track is common across the team and serves as a massive incentive. The goal is clear and shared by everyone. This helps keep everyone pushing in the same direction—even when positive results are elusive. They are in the fight together—win or lose.

Elimination of Distractions

Within the average workplace, distractions serve as significant productivity-killers. They may range from in-person interruptions to online distractions, occupational noise to water cooler gossip, social media to smoke breaks. Not all distractions are negative in and of themselves, but may result in "a 'chain of distraction,' where stages of preparation, diversion, resumption and recovery take time away from an ongoing task" (Mark et al., 2018, p. 2), or "interruption residue, where the content of the interruption remains in memory and can interfere with the current task-at-hand" (p. 3).

In high-stakes arenas such as MotoGP, where focus and concentration are crucial, and productivity and optimal performance are paramount, an environment free from distractions is a top priority. A number of measures have been implemented by Team Vinco to that end. One is the logistical layout of the garage itself. Designated workspaces are allotted based on common roles and tasks. The crew chiefs, the mechanics, and the riders' dedicated electronics engineers share a large space at the front of the garage. This area has roll-up doors that open directly onto pit lane and are designed to lessen the noise impact when the bikes are cranked—to the limited extent that such is possible. The tire specialists and the gearbox mechanic operate behind a partition on the back side of the garage. The team manager, technical manager, data engineers, parts manager, and marketing and communications team occupy office spaces inside the transport trucks and the hospitality unit. There are also private quarters for the riders, as well as designated meeting rooms. This division of space facilitates purposeful on-task activities and reduces environmental distractions. Access to these areas is strictly governed, and is limited to members of the team and a select few outsiders who have been granted special passes.

Members of Team Vinco need not be distracted even by decisions regarding the clothing they wear or the food they eat, as both are provided to them by the team. Prior to the start of the season, Gabe is responsible for ordering and distributing team uniforms. These branded shirts, jackets, trousers, shorts, and shoes are worn throughout the season, with team members receiving instructions on what outfit to wear during each day of the race weekend. Meals are prepared by the team chef and served in the hospitality unit at set times each day. A schedule is posted inside the garage at the beginning of each race weekend for reference. If the workload is heavy or time is tight, the chef arranges for food to be delivered right to the garage where the mechanics continue working as they munch on sandwiches, fruit, and ice cream.

Proper Time Management

Time is a precious commodity that must be invested wisely and effectively. Race weekends adhere to a strict schedule handed down by the MotoGP governing body, and the team's daily activities are regimented internally as well. Members operate within fairly tight time constraints under ordinary circumstances, and even more so if a rider crashes during practice or qualifying and extensive repair work must be done to his bike. Proper time management is imperative in order for them to stay on track, minimize stress, and remain productive. In addition to working smart and maintaining focus, team members employ additional time-saving strategies. One is eliminating the middle man and going straight to the source, as Giorgia explained to me, "If I have a question, for example, about practice starts and I know that my colleague has a lot of experience in that area, I don't waste time. I go to him and ask his opinion." She said this is much more productive than trying to figure out the problem on her own, or worse, operating on limited knowledge or incorrect information.

Time management can be viewed not only from a task-related standpoint, but also as it relates to communication. Digital-era innovations are metamorphosing ways of working, and MotoGP teams rely heavily upon emerging technologies to facilitate the expeditious transfer of knowledge and information. It is far more practical and time-efficient to circulate plans, schedules, and reports electronically rather than printing and distributing everything by hand. Smartphones and computers are useful communication tools and time-savers, and the team regularly uses email, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, and various social media platforms to communicate across spatiotemporal contexts, stay abreast of current developments, and receive timely feedback from colleagues. Inside the pressurized, everchanging MotoGP workplace environment, members of Team Vinco have demonstrated ways of operating within strict time constraints without compromising productivity.

Passion

Positive emotion influences an individual's interests and behaviors, and often serves as a motivating and regulating factor for members of teams within the workplace (Kriek, 2019; Løvoll et al., 2017). In his study of employee satisfaction, clinical psychologist Frederick Herzberg (1959) concluded that long-term motivation is a byproduct of a person's positive outlook toward the actual work they do, rather than the context in which they do it. With regard to Team Vinco, both the work and the context (i.e., MotoGP, the paddock, the garage) contribute to the high level of satisfaction and motivation within the garage. The word most commonly used by team members to describe the extent of their positivity and motivation is passion. They expressed sentiments such as "the motorcycle is still my passion," "passion, in the end, is the main thing," "my passion is to come in, to be there in the garage," "passion helps to keep the team united," and "without the passion, this job would be a chore."

Ruben likened this passion to an addiction: "On Tuesday after the race, when I'm at home reading the newspapers with my cappuccino and croissant, I'm like, okay, when's the next plane? When are we going back to the racetrack? It's really...it's an addiction." Pietro elaborated on the relationship between passion and the high-stakes work environment inside Team Vinco: "It is not a job, you know; for everybody, it is a passion. Okay, it is a job in that we work for money, but in this particular job you work for a result." When I asked Quentin what brings members of the team back to the MotoGP paddock year after year, he said, "I think the primary aspect everyone would point to is passion. When people have that, everything becomes easier." He pointed to the unusual nature of work inside the MotoGP paddock and how that factors in. "This is not a normal job. We spend many hours, many days during a year with these people, so not having

passion—not being positive or not demonstrating that you are there for the team—would be a problem."

I heard this passion for motorcycling expressed in many ways: "beautiful," "all-consuming," "living the dream," and even "a sickness." Ruben succinctly summarized the sentiment of those inside the Team Vinco garage as follows: "Our life is all about racing, adrenalin, and passion." Passion enables team members to spend long periods of time away from their homes. It carries them through moments of frustration, difficulty, discouragement, and stress. It makes the long hours inside the garage worthwhile. Passion keeps them coming back and pushing forward, again and again.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this study, I was guided by a desire to discover how members of Team Vinco, an elite international professional motorcycle racing team, coordinate their activities and efforts in order to effectively function as a unit and achieve successful outcomes. Framing my findings within the Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise, I described the structure, culture, and characteristics of Team Vinco; provided insight into how its members live, interact, and carry out their specialized work; and shed light on their typical ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, as guided by Malinowski's (1922) three ethnographic aims. This approach to learning and meaning-making within an idiosyncratic microculture dovetails with the contention of Pimmer et al. (2013) that "knowing is socially, culturally, spatially, and temporally distributed between actors and their environment" (p. 3), and lends credence to the notion that individuals with diverse levels of expertise who work and think collaboratively often produce better results than individuals who function independently. This ethnographic account is deeply rooted in the native point of view, and my informants' cultural

language and experience create meaningful context and guide the unfolding of the research narrative (Jayathilaka, 2021).

Although each ethnographic field site is unique and research findings are context-specific, this study lays the groundwork for continued exploration of expert teams and their unique workplace practices, both within professional motorcycle racing and beyond. It is my hope that my framework for categorizing and assessing expert teams' performance-related competencies, The Seven Ps of Workplace Expertise, will be useful to other researchers as they conduct similar organizational studies.

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