

## **Temporariness and the pursuit of goals:**

### **The case of Brazil and Germany national teams in the 2014 World Cup**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This study contributes to the understanding of temporary organizing by going beyond traditional studies of single temporary organizations (TOs) to propose a framework that compares the Brazilian and German football teams in the 2014 World Cup as two TOs in the same industry, sharing similar rules for duration, but embedded in different contexts and competing against each other. It explores how their members attached different meanings to temporariness; experienced different temporal boundaries; had different levels of focus on the present, task immersion, and buffering from the external environment; and ultimately reached different levels of performance and goal attainment.

#### **Keywords:**

Temporariness, temporary organizing, team, task, context, boundary, failure, goals, performance

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

It was July 8, 2014. Germany had just scored its second goal against Brazil in a semi-final game of the 2014 World Cup of Football<sup>1</sup>. The game was being watched by hundreds of millions of people around the world who witnessed what no one had ever seen in the history of football: the Brazilian team seemed to experience a collective collapse, allowing Germany to score 3 more goals, one after the other, for a historic, humiliating total of five goals in the space of 18 minutes. In fact, by the end of the game, when Germany scored two more goals, the scoreboard screen had to scroll to accommodate all 7 of them in a single display (see video at Levin, 2014). Social media exploded: 35.6 million Tweets were exchanged to discuss the game, breaking Twitter's previous record (held by the Super Bowl XLVIII, with 24.9 million tweets during the game). The game finally ended at 7-1, with Brazil scoring a goal at the last minute. Brazil, the only country to have qualified for every single World Cup, the country that has won the most World Cups ever, the spiritual home of the "beautiful game" (Goldblatt, 2014; Squires, 2016), then had the insufferable distinction of another world record: the most humiliating defeat. Newspapers around the world competed for the most provocative front page, and all kinds of media joined the fray to analyze what happened (Chari, 2015; Haynes & Boyle, 2017).

The Brazil vs. Germany match was more than a sports event or a cultural landmark. From the standpoint of organization studies, it presents the opportunity to explore a situation where the performance and goal attainment of two temporary organizations (TOs) - the 2014 Brazil and Germany national teams - differed enormously. Therefore, we use primary and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, all references to "World Cup" and "national team" hereafter refer to men's FIFA Football World Cup (or soccer, as it is known in the United States).

secondary data from live and video recordings of the Brazil versus Germany game and other 2014 World Cup games, personal interviews with Brazilian and German football fans and experts, hundreds of print, radio, TV and Internet sources in Brazil, the U.S., and Europe, as well as a review of 50-plus years of literature about the culture and history of football to conduct a case study and develop a theoretical framework exploring differences on the two TOs' internal functions and performance.

The next sections provide a brief description of the Brazil and Germany teams in the 2014 World Cup; explore the application of the proposed framework to the two TOs; and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

### **2014 BRAZIL AND GERMANY NATIONAL TEAMS**

The World Cup is organized by FIFA, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (Tomlinson, 2015). It involves a qualification phase and a month-long tournament phase, when 32 countries compete for the title. The Cup is the sports event with the highest audience ratings in the world, likely above the Olympics (Bayar & Schaur, 2014).

In 2007 Brazil won the winning bid to host the Cup in 2014. The group stage of the 2014 World Cup started on June 12 (with the game between Brazil and Croatia) and involved 32 teams competing in 8 groups of 4. Advancing teams then played in the single elimination knockout stage ("round of 16", quarter-finals, semi-finals, finals). The Brazil versus Germany game, on July 8, was the first semi-final match, and took place in Estádio Mineirão in Belo Horizonte. In Germany, the game was televised with an audience of 87.8% of all viewers (32.57 million people), making it the nation's highest-rated program ever (a record that would only be broken a few days later, in the World Cup final match against Argentina). Germany scored four goals in the period of six minutes, ending half time at 5-0. Germany added two more goals in the

second half, with Brazil scoring one at the very last moment, to end the game in a historic 7-1. Having lost to Germany, Brazil then lost to the Netherlands, finishing up in 4th place. The Cup ended on July 13, when Germany won the 2014 title, defeating Argentina.

Once a national team is out of the Cup, the squad is disbanded and the players return to their clubs. Players are not “employees” of the national team, either during or in-between the quadrennial tournament phase of the World Cup, since their salaries keep being paid by the sports clubs with which they are affiliated. No player is “entitled” to a spot in the national team, but some have a higher likelihood of being called again.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Our theoretical framework, shown in Figure 1, uses temporariness concepts to compare and contrast two TOs, the German and Brazilian national teams, in the 2014 World Cup. Following Bakker and Janowicz-Panjaitan (2009), the framework uses a micro-behavior perspective to understand the macro-level relationship between temporariness and TO<sup>2</sup> performance. TOs are deeply embedded in wider organizational and institutional contexts (Tukiainen & Granqvist, 2016). Given that contextual factors (e.g., national, cultural, contractual and inter-organizational) can contribute to the emergence of divergent interests and can influence the performance of TOs (Marrewijk et al., 2016), Appendices 1 and 2 provide information about the context in which each team had evolved to compete in The Cup.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Temporariness is understood here as an "*ex ante*" defined, limited duration (Bakker 2010; Bakker, & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009; Grabher, 2002; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Bakker & Kenis,

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<sup>2</sup> To address the tension as to how distinguish temporary and permanent organizations, it is important to note that temporary in this context “should refer to predetermined duration, i.e., whether at the outset the time boundaries of an organizational process or venture are explicitly set” (Bakker et al., 2016: 1708).

2009; Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008; Sydow, Lindkvist, & DeFillippi, 2004; Van Marrewijk et al., 2016). Predetermination of the timeframe during which a TO is formed (“left bracket”) and disbanded (“right bracket”) is an intrinsic aspect of such organizations (Burke & Morley, 2016). In our case, temporariness is as an organization-level variable (top center of Figure 1). The “left bracket” that marked the start of both the Brazil and Germany TOs is considered here to be early June of 2014, when the official composition of the teams for the 2014 tournament phase of the Cup was officially finalized and the players were called to join the team. The “right bracket” that marked their end was defined by the rules FIFA established for the World Cup: elimination at different points of the month-long tournament, or going all the way to the end, which would imply remaining as a team for a maximum of 7 games from beginning to end.

In the next sections we contrast how the German team (as illustrated on the left-half of the framework in Figure 1) reaped the benefits of TOs predicted and explained by TO theory (Bakker & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis & Vermeulen, 2009), while the Brazilian team, confronted with the same organizational-level “objective” temporariness, approached temporary organizing in a completely different way, with catastrophic results (as illustrated on the right-half of the framework).

### **Temporariness and Pursuit of Goals: Germany**

The context of the Germany TO is summarized in Appendix A. The differences in the contexts surrounding the formation of the 2014 Brazil and Germany teams were translated in sharp differences in the meanings the members of the two teams attached to temporariness as an “awareness of impending termination.” Confronted with the same objective FIFA rules for the possible duration of their temporary organizations, Löw’s team interpreted temporariness from a “seven games” perspective, whereas Scolari’s team interpreted it such that they were “*almost* hexa-champions.” As indicated in Figure 1, the meanings the Germany team attached to their

temporariness, together with the thick temporal boundaries that shielded them, influenced the TO members' time orientation, task immersion, and buffering from the external environment (Bakker, 2010; Bakker & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis & Vermeulen, 2009).

### ***Time orientation***

The framing of temporariness as “seven games” and the thick left and right temporal boundaries of the German team helped its members to a focus on the present. It is interesting to note that, on one hand, it takes a lot of preparation to create a high-performance TO like a World Cup team; on the other hand, once it starts operating, members must be fully “present” to channel all their energy into peak performance and react to unexpected opportunities and challenges as they arise.

### ***Task immersion***

Team members were highly immersed in their task. The coaching style of the head coach (Löw) emphasized consistency and attention to small details, so players were involved in lots of training, where they rehearsed different plays and contingencies. For each game, they prepared not only a plan B, but a plan C, D, and so on. Löw was a modern, creative coach, always open to new ideas and experimentation, favoring attacking tactics, a flexible style, innovative passing moves, free-kick variations. The 2014 German team, while efficient and athletic in the German tradition, also became known for a “beautiful game” that had historically been associated with Brazil. They often referred to flow-type experiences, and displayed joy in the sport.

### ***Buffering from external environment***

In addition to their thick temporal boundaries, the German team's home base during the 2014 World Cup, in a brand-new resort located in a secluded, beautiful beach in Bahia, and built

to their specifications, afforded them a higher degree of buffering from the pressures of the external environment, in comparison with the other teams who stayed in big city hotels. This protective environment provided camaraderie, privacy and relaxation, but not at the cost of being hostile to locals. The team became famous for its goodwill and exceptionally cordial relations with the local population, who ended up rooting for them all the way to the final game. The locals respected the team's need for privacy, and interactions remained within preset boundaries such as special events and the beach. The team handled the potential tension between their temporariness and the town's permanence in a very effective way: after the Cup, the team made donations for an ambulance and a school for the small town, and one of the players paid for surgeries needed by 23 local children.

### ***Performance and goal attainment***

Germany started the 2014 World Cup in Group G, where it defeated Portugal, tied Ghana and beat the U.S. team. After these three games, it went on to defeat Algeria and France. Then, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, Germany played its 6<sup>th</sup> game in the Cup, the historic semi-final match where it defeated Brazil 7-1, Brazil's worst defeat in a World Cup ever. Germany played a collective game, where they seemed to have more than just 11 players (the number of players in a football team). Afterwards, many Brazilians wondered why the Germans did not just control the game after the first few goals, a common tactic in such a critical game. But they stayed focused in the moment, playing as if each goal were the first one. By the end of the game, Brazilian fans were chanting "Ole!<sup>3</sup>" after each German pass or newly scored goal, and booing the Brazilian players.

From there the German team went to its 7<sup>th</sup> and final game, where it defeated Argentina 1-0 in extra time to win the World Cup, thus making Germany a four-time World Cup champion,

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<sup>3</sup> Used as a shout of approval, triumph, or encouragement.

a record so far only surpassed by Brazil (five-time winner). Most Brazilians rooted for the German team in the final game against Argentina, even after the humiliating defeat in the semi-finals. Chancellor Merkel was present to cheer the team as it won its 7<sup>th</sup> and final game. They were greeted as heroes upon their return to Germany.

Löw's team had played its seven games, and it had done it his way: all players had been consistently good, and no player had a disappointing performance. Different players had distinguished themselves in each game. The goal that decided the final against Argentina and won Germany the World Cup came from a late and possibly risky substitution by Löw. It was scored on the 113<sup>th</sup> minute by Mario Götze, one of the new generation players. The team broke an impressive record in 2014: one of its senior players, Miroslav Klose (36 years old), scored a record 16<sup>th</sup> goal in a World Cup.

Germany's 2014 team functioned as a high performance TO. It exhibited creative problem-solving, innovation, collective play, experimentation and risk-taking. Löw expressed a willingness to try anything, to borrow ideas from anywhere. The team's deep talent reserves absorbed injuries and substitutions without jeopardizing collective performance or goal attainment. They did justice to the national team's nickname, "*Die Mannschaft*" ("The Team"): not just an agglomeration of single talents, but a synergetic team where the whole was bigger, and more important, than the sum of its parts.

The German TO that beat Brazil 7-1 and made its way through seven consecutive games to win the 2014 World Cup was not only ready for the task's intensity (Soroka & Lago-Peñas, 2016), but also ready to enjoy it (Goldman, 2014). They handled temporariness by working intensely, having deep reserves, and doing it all with a smile. As a German daily newspaper said in an editorial: "The world [was] smiling back."

## **Temporariness and Pursuit of Goals: Brazil**

The context of the Brazil TO is summarized in Appendix B. As seen in Figure 1, the interpretation of temporariness as “one hand on the Hexa,” together with the lack of thick temporal boundaries to shield them from history, influenced the TO members’ time orientation, task immersion, and buffering from the external environment (Bakker, 2010; Bakker & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis & Vermeulen, 2009).

### ***Time orientation***

The Brazil team developed a complicated time orientation – a sense of the present as a precarious bridge between the past and the future, a chasm to be crossed as fast as possible to get to the right side of history, the side where Brazil would occupy its rightful place as an “hexa-champion” of the world (six-time World Cup winner). This interplay of temporariness and permanence can lead to some subjective experiences of time. When the present is a link in history, this bridge suspended between past and future can feel very short, or very long – it can feel “infinite while it lasts” (Moraes, 1960, p. 96).<sup>4</sup>

### ***Task immersion***

Brazil’s 2014 team members experienced low task immersion. It was all about winning, “the hollow cult of victory” (Early, 2014). It was all about concentrating on the outcome, not about playing, being immersed in the process or experiencing any kind of flow. This emphasis on the all-or-nothing outcome of winning a 6<sup>th</sup> World Cup (the “Hexa”), with direct consequences for both the history of Brazilian football and likely the entire future of their

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<sup>4</sup> There is a viral video that could be used here as a vivid, unforgettable metaphor (Mathias, 2014). This Facebook video, which has already attracted almost 4 million visits in less than a month, starts by showing a temporary, apparently rickety wooden bridge, and we see a heavy truck getting ready to start crossing it. No spoilers will be offered here about what follows, so that the reader can have the full experience of the video (<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10203523365462613>).

individual careers, took the players' focus away from the task and created an environment of high emotional fragility (Wagstaff & Hanton, 2017). Several players engaged in excessive displays of emotion, bursting into tears before, during and after the games. One of the most vivid images of a total breakdown in a player's capacity for task immersion happened in the round of 16, when the game with Chile ended in a tie and they had to go into penalty shootouts. The team captain, Thiago Silva, usually a strong presence in the field, burst into tears and refused to take a shot; instead, he walked away and sat on a ball, with his back turned away from the team, while the penalty shootout was taking place. The emotional fragility of the team was such that the press started referring to the players as "meninos" (boys), even though some were in their late 20s or 30s, and all were used to playing internationally, in highly competitive games.

### ***Buffering from external environment***

Prior studies have well documented how TO performance can benefit from higher degrees of insulation during the execution phase (Bakker & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Bakker & Kenis, 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis & Vermeulen, 2009). However, there was very little buffering from external pressures and demands on the Brazilian players. Their training camp was Granja Comary, the home base of the national team, opened in 1987 and renovated for 2014. There was a permanent presence of almost 1,000 reporters, politicians and celebrities on the camp, located 55 miles from Rio de Janeiro. TV Globo, the major Brazilian network, had virtually unfettered access to the team, who was under constant pressure to give interviews to all kinds of media (Kristiansen, Abrahamsen & Pedersen, 2017). Just as had happened leading up to Brazil's defeat to Uruguay in the 1950 World Cup, everyone seemed to treat the "Hexa" as a *fait accompli*. The same message of 1950 was being bombarded to the 2014 players, loud and clear: they needed to deliver the long overdue championship.

### ***Performance and goal attainment***

Brazil played in Group A, winning Croatia, tying with Mexico and defeating Cameroon. After advancing to the “round of 16,” Brazil’s head coach, Scolari, was nervous about the game with Chile, and his apprehension was communicated to the players. Failing to in break a 1-1 tie with Chile even after extra time, Brazil had to win the game in a highly emotional penalty shootout (3-1), when the team captain, Thiago Silva, had the emotional breakdown mentioned before, refused to take the penalties, sat on the ball and cried, facing away from his teammates.

The quarter-finals against Colombia was a violent game and even though Brazil defeated Colombia (2-1), two major players became unavailable for the upcoming game against Germany. Neymar, the major star of the team, was severely injured, and left the field carried on a stretcher with a fractured vertebra. Team captain and defensive leader Thiago Silva received his second yellow card in the World Cup, and was punished with a one-match suspension. For any team, the loss of two major players would be difficult to overcome. For Brazil, with no plan B, no deep bench of reserves, no practice in playing with alternative configurations of players, it proved to be an absolute disaster.

Up to that point, Neymar had been critical for the team’s performance. He had scored 4 goals, assisted in 1, and twice been chosen as “the man of the game”. Scolari’s overreliance on Neymar had been so pronounced that the team had received the nickname of “Neymar & Co.” Critics complained that Scolari used the team to bring the best out of Neymar, instead of using Neymar to bring the best out of the team. Therefore, it is hard to describe the dramatic intensity of the moment when the nation saw on live TV this talented player, barely 22 years old, suffer an injury that might end his career or even leave him paralyzed. It later turned out that the broken vertebra would heal completely and in a short period of time, but Neymar would be out for the

rest of the tournament. But the emotional tsunami did not subside: tributes (including the president's) poured in, and the nation treated him as a war hero (Rodrigues & Fernandes, 2015).

Neymar's absence did not represent just the disruption of a tactical scheme or the loss of his technical contribution. It was more like the team losing its talisman. When Brazil entered the field for the game against Germany, Neymar's teammates dedicated the game to him: they would be playing for their fallen comrade, and to signify this they entered the field holding aloft his jersey, like a reliquary. "*It was as though Neymar had died and was looking down at his former teammates from heaven, rather than watching them on television.*" (Early, 2014).

While Neymar's loss provoked this vivid, collective emotional frenzy, many consider Thiago Silva's absence to have been a more critical factor in the game against Germany. As the team captain, he had been a centerpiece of the defense, and his suspension left the team vulnerable to Germany's attack.

The Brazilian team's performance in the game against Germany revealed all its underlying emotional fragility, lack of collective play, lack of resilience to adversity (Wagstaff, Sarkar, Davidson & Fletcher, 2017). Scolari often talked about the team as his "family:" on one hand this sounded cozy, but on the other hand it also often translated into low propensity to change, low experimentation and creativity. At its worst, it could mean rigidity, a tendency to keep things as they were, since it had worked in the past. Scolari's "win at any cost" approach, with its direct, physical and aggressive style, instead of unpredictable attacks, had made the team more vulnerable to fouls, injuries and suspensions. Given the lack of strong substitutes, this vulnerability had become critical.

Scolari was often criticized for not placing enough emphasis on training, especially in terms of its collective aspects. Even after losing Neymar and Thiago Silva, there was not enough

practice of alternative collective tactics with the players that would replace them. In spite of all the collective emotion when singing the national anthem, *a cappella*, during each game it all turned into a one-man show on the field.

In the end, the secret to defeating Brazil turned out to be simple. Take away two players, score two early goals, and the entire house of cards collapses. Germany played “emotional judo” (Early, 2014): instead of being intimidated by the massive emotional energy coming from the crowd in the stadium, they reflected it back against the Brazilian players. After the first 2 goals, it was all over. For Brazil, the weight of Germany’s two goals was more than they could bear: there was a “psychological contagion,” and they seemed to collectively lose all sense of control or coordination. What happened after the second goal has been described with expressions like capitulation, collapse, meltdown, blackout, blanking out, and fuses blown. A former Brazilian champion compared it to the players being collectively struck, simultaneously, by a “medical emergency” (Zico, 2014). It was like a nightmare, a slow-motion movie where some actors move normally around and others stay frozen in place. But while Brazilians were frozen, Germans remained “present in the moment,” and kept scoring goals, one after the other. In the first 29 minutes of the game, Germany scored 5 goals, the most goals ever in a World Cup semifinal (a total of 5 goals in the space of 18 minutes); 4 of the 5 goals happened just from the 23<sup>rd</sup> minute to the 29<sup>th</sup> minute.

Many observers pointed out the Brazilian team’s crisis of leadership during this debacle. The substitute captain, David Luiz (standing in for Thiago Silva), improvised individual plays. Feeling the need to do something -anything - he was in agony, thinking about what this defeat would mean for the nation. In an emotional post-game interview, he said: “I just want my people to be happy.” Scolari did not intervene or change tactics. While the German goals kept coming,

no one had the initiative to dive or feign an injury, to break the rhythm and give the team some time to regroup.

Brazilian fans could not believe what they were seeing: was it a replay, or had Germany just scored yet another goal? They watched in “stunned, disbelieving horror,” as if they were 60,000 four-year old kids being told simultaneously that there is no Santa (Early, 2014). At a certain point, between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> goal, the atmosphere seemed to change from agony to surrealism. Many started doing the unimaginable – leaving early. Others began to realize that the situation had crossed the threshold from tragic to comic. To lose a game 2-1 is tragic. To lose it 7-0 (or 7-1, as happened at the very last moment), is almost funny. Memes and unforgettable images spread around the Internet, making fun of or commiserating with Brazil’s suffering. The stadium crowd ended up seeking relief in gallows humor, saluting each pass from the German team with an animated "Olé!" Their booing was reserved, instead, for the home team and the Brazilian president.

When the end mercifully came, at a little over 90 minutes, the Brazilian team had, indeed, made history – just not the history they wanted. They would be known for their modern-day Maracanazo (Moore, 2016), almost immediately nicknamed the “Mineirazo” (after the name of the stadium, the Mineirão). A few days later the Brazilian team would lose the 3<sup>rd</sup> place play-off against the Netherlands, ending up in 4<sup>th</sup> place in the 2014 World Cup. But for the players and fans, this felt almost inconsequential. What really mattered was that the team had failed to achieve the “Hexa.”

Scolari resigned his post, and was replaced by Dunga, who had been the coach from 2006 to 2010. Goalkeeper Júlio César and David Luiz, the substitute captain in the game against Germany, offered public apologies to the nation. Fred, who had been savagely booed during the

Germany game, decided to end his international career. The careers of all players were negatively affected by their participation in the 2014 national team, which confirmed their fears about the consequences of failure.

## DISCUSSION

This exploratory study has interesting implications for the theory and practice of temporary organizing. The proposed framework illustrates the usefulness of a contextual, comparative, micro-behavior perspective to analyze the macro-level effects of temporariness on the performance and goal pursuit of different TOs.

Nelson Rodrigues, a Brazilian writer who was passionate about football, famously said that one does not improvise a defeat, “it happens before the game” (2012, Kindle location 1146). The framework in Figure 1 helps us understand how what came “before the game” influenced the performance and goal attainment of the German and Brazilian teams in the 2014 World Cup. These two TOs (embedded in different contexts, but operating in the same industry, confronting the same rules for their *ex ante* defined, limited duration, and engaged in direct competition) offer stark contrasts in the various elements of the framework: the meanings that TO members attach to temporariness and the thickness of the temporal boundaries shielding them from the past and the future; the level of TO members’ focus on the present, task immersion, and buffering from the environment; and the TOs’ performance and pursuit of goals. Looking at the two teams helps us appreciate different contingencies for obtaining and managing resources, and for navigating the dialectic tensions between temporariness and permanence.

This study suggests several implications for “regular” (non-sports related) TOs. Context matters, but it is not destiny. Our study shows that leaders have an influential role (Arthur, Wagstaff, & Hardy, 2017). Brazil’s epic failure in the World Cup offers a vivid example of the

need for leadership and planning. Leaders who truly believe that “a defeat is not improvised, it happens before the game” can lay the foundation for success before a TO even starts to operate. They can analyze the context and explore the type of planning and resource availability it requires and provides. For high-intensity TOs, with high stakes and rigid deadlines, it is particularly important to examine the type of pre-planning possible, and the layers of resources and contingency plans necessary to cope with unforeseen circumstances.

Permanent organizations (POs) and leaders of prospective TOs should be particularly attentive to the long-term development and nurturing of people who are a good fit for TO work. The high intensity involved in some TOs may impose emotional or personality requirements that a high-performer in a PO might not necessarily possess. This developmental process should also extend to collective talent, so that TO members are better able to proceed from the, as soon as the TO starts operations.

Further, our study suggests that leaders should consider the type of approach to talent management that will best fit the needs of a prospective TO, given its context. Our two TOs exemplify two distinct approaches. Germany did not rely on stars individually: instead, it built a resilient system (Fransen, Boen, Stouten, Cotterill, & Vande Broek, 2017; Wagstaff et al., 2017), capable of “heedful interrelating and mindful comprehension” (Weick, 1993, p. 357), with layers of backup plans and resources to protect it from “normal accidents” (Perrow, 2012). In contrast, Brazil trusted the brilliance of individual, extraordinary talent: Neymar was like a bright sun at the center of the team, surrounded by teammate “planets.” It should be noted, however, that although Brazil’s performance in the Cup was sub-par, either approach might be successful, depending on circumstances: in the 2016 Rio Olympics, a star performance by Neymar enabled Brazil to exact “revenge” over Germany (Longman, Mills & Lee, 2016).

Leaders may also play an important role in shaping the meaning that TO members attach to temporariness. Instead of automatically adopting one or another interpretation of temporariness, they should be aware of the strategic implications of alternative formulations that might be possible in each context, and of their own potential role in influencing the social construction of TO members' shared meanings of temporariness. For example, would a TO's interests be better served if temporariness came to be interpreted as the German team did ("seven games") – an intense, deep, compressed experience, like a climbing expedition that is significant in and of itself? Or as the Brazilian team did ("being almost there, one hand already on the Hexa"), a bridge that only matters because it leads somewhere?

Our study suggests that, while contextual variables are expected to influence all the other parts of the proposed framework (i.e., thickness of temporal boundaries, level of TO members' focus on present, task immersion, buffering from the environment), there may be degrees of freedom that leaders can influence. Therefore, leaders should pay attention to alternative choices in these areas and their possible consequences. A critical area to explore is how those choices might influence the way TO members react to moments of sudden change (Engwall & Westling, 2004). When Neymar was injured in the game with Colombia, this event led to a collective emotional tsunami that crested at the start of the following game and drowned the Brazilian team after Germany scored its second goal. Germany, on the other hand, handled the loss of players with equanimity and, after the Brazilian team lost its bearings, just kept making goals, playing with calm problem-solving and perfect coordination (Early, 2014).

The game that took place in the Mineirão Stadium on July 8, 2014 was not just between two national football teams. It was a clash between two contrasting approaches to temporary organizing, between two TOs that had come from very different contexts. Germany had spent a

decade building the future of its football. When the time arrived for the 2014 World Cup, the German TO was prepared and able to focus on their task: Germany had built a resilient and effective system, not an agglomeration of individual talents (Wagstaff et al., 2016). Brazil, however, spent the time singing the glories of its past 5 World Cups, and, with “one hand already on the Hexa,” it relied on the hope that the other talented hand would somehow reach that 6<sup>th</sup> Cup. But when the time came, the Brazil team was unprepared for what the task and the TO context would turn out to require.

Future research is needed to address the limitations of this study. While the two teams offered an excellent opportunity for case analysis and comparison, they are still only two TOs, of a very special nature. Organization and TO scholars are increasingly interested in studying sports teams and events (e.g., Olson & Schwab, 2000; Parent & MacIntosh, 2013; Swaab, Schaerer, Anicich, Ronay, & Galinsky, 2014). World Cup national football teams (a still virtually unexplored context in TO literature), can offer a rich variety of phenomena about TOs in a very short period of time, in a way that is relatively easy to observe and study. However, further research is needed to ascertain how our framework might apply to other types of TOs (e.g., high-stakes, high-visibility project teams). Moreover, personal traits of TO members appear to influence the process and performance of a TO, but an in-depth examination of personal traits was outside the scope of our study. Thus, we encourage future research to explore the individual characteristics that influence one’s ability to work well in TOs, in comparison with POs, and in one type of TO versus another.

We hope that our framework’s original contribution will inspire other researchers to go beyond the traditional studies of single TOs, in order to compare different TOs, situated in different contexts but sharing similar *ex ante* - defined rules that limit their duration. This will

shed further light on how the members of such TOs may attach different meanings to temporariness; experience different temporal boundaries; have different levels of focus on the present, task immersion, and buffering from the external environment; and ultimately reach different levels of performance and goal attainment.

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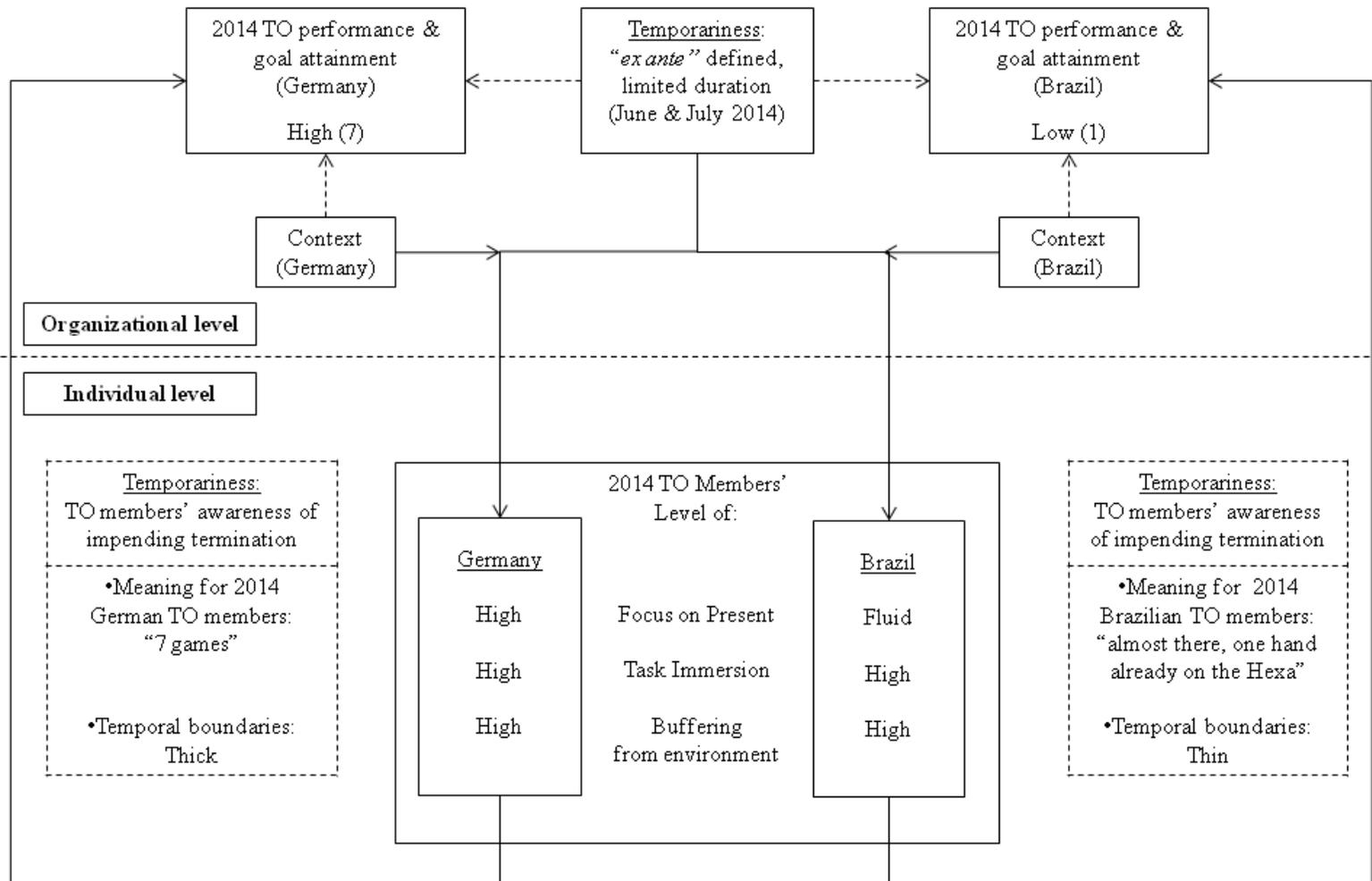
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**Figure 1.** The effects of temporariness and context for two temporary organizations (Brazil and Germany national football teams)



### **APPENDIX A: Context of the Germany team**

Germany is the only country besides Brazil to qualify for every World Cup (with the only exception of 1950, when they were excluded because of their participation in World War II). The context of the German team was one where victories were seen as coming from hard, collective, persistent work. With Germany being one of the largest economies in the world, considerable resources were devoted to the long-term planning of a wide-ranging player development effort (Güllich, 2014; Moliterno, Beck, Beckman & Meyer, 2014). Clubs strove to create favorable conditions for top players to stay in country, avoiding the talent diaspora experienced by countries like Brazil and resulting in lower role conflicts for players called to play for the national team (Slater, Barker & Mellalieu, 2017).

The German team that came together in early June 2014 was considered by many to be the best prepared team in the World Cup, due to a decade's worth of commitment to hard work and long-term investment in developing talent and promoting innovation. They were under the leadership of Joachim Löw, a creative, confident head coach who had already enjoyed a long tenure and who was in the role for the long run (Löw became head coach in 2006, and before that he had been assistant of coach since 2004).

Even the choice of the location for their Brazilian stay reflected a preoccupation with both physical and mental preparedness. While other national teams stayed in hotels within the big cities, or failed to acclimate appropriately to the warm weather, the German team chose to stay in a brand new resort, tailored for their needs, that had been built by a sponsor in Bahia, in the northeast of Brazil, right by a gorgeous beach and next to a small town with a friendly population and just the perfect weather conditions for players to get used to the range of climates that traveling to games to play all the way to the finals would involve.

The decade-long investment in talent development and retention resulted in a 2014 World Cup German team where most players (74%) came from German clubs. They were used to each other (facilitating collective play), and experienced fewer role conflicts when called to join the national team for qualifying and friendly games.

Long term planning and preparation also resulted in a “deep bench”, an insurance policy against unpredictable events. All players in the 2014 national team had similarly high ability: there were no weaknesses, no superstars. If injuries or suspensions happened, they were replaceable, even if 3 or 4 were unavailable at the same time. Not only were they individually talented, they were effective together, in different combinations. Löw’s habit of fielding entire “experimental teams” developed collective talent, not just individual.

The “win-seven-consecutive-games” time horizon (to ultimately win the Cup) became the foundation for constructing the shared meaning the German team members attached to their “awareness of impending termination” in the 2014 World Cup (see Figure 1). Under Löw’s leadership, they perceived the temporariness of their 2014 TO as an intense, deep, compressed experience of consistent peak performance. On the one hand, this represented an endurance challenge: it meant that the whole team had to deliver peak performance for *all seven* consecutive games, in a relatively short period of time, regardless of any unforeseen circumstances such as injuries and suspensions. This was interpreted as being beyond the reach of any single individual implying that they would have to rely on the team having a deep bench, players in top shape and with equally high talent who could step in for each other as needed, and who were trained to achieve instant synergy with different subsets of teammates. On the other hand, attaching this “seven games” meaning to temporariness also made the goal achievable: the task was intense and challenging, but it was *only* seven games, a short time.

In order to achieve the intensity and depth of experience that resulted from this awareness of temporariness, and to manage the “yin-yang” tension of temporariness (both “*all seven*” and “*only seven*” games), thick temporal boundaries were created around TO members, enveloping the German team in a bubble of high atemporality (Janowicz-Panjaitan, Kenis and Vermeulen, 2009). In their remote beach resort in Bahia, the team was protected from time-consuming demands from the press, agents, clubs, and fans.

The team purposefully avoided the perception that they were to make history with their TO, either in reference to the past or the future. In the 2014 World Cup, the German national team was not playing for a place in history: it was playing to win seven consecutive games. A thick left bracket shielded the team from the past: the 2014 team was relieved from the weight of the failures of the past, which had led the country to the decade-long effort to reinvent its football. And the experiences of 2002, 2006 and 2010 of “almost” getting to the first place in the World Cup was not allowed to haunt *this* team. By the same token, a thick right bracket also protected the team from the burden of the future: they were there to win seven games, not to engage in an epic battle with life and death consequences that would live with them, and their nation, forever.

## **APPENDIX B: Context of the Brazil team**

The context of the Brazilian team was one where, for decades, football victories had been seen as a part of the national heritage. Brazil was the “country of football,” the home of the “beautiful game” (Fontes & Buarque de Hollanda, 2014; Goldblatt, 2014; Squires, 2016), the only country to have qualified for every single World Cup ever held, and the country with the most World Cup wins (five victories, in 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994 and 2002). The words “Brazilian footballer” belong together just like “French chef” or “Tibetan monk” (Bellos, 2003, p. 13).

Brazil’s football is celebrated in every aspect of its culture, including literature and music. It gives the anonymous fan a sense of being part of something truly big. For Brazilians, football is not just a spectator sport. Talent sprouts wherever a kid meets an improvised ball. But for every player who is gone, ten others emerge. On the one hand, the fact that talent seems to be everywhere is great news for recruiting. On the other hand, this has often led to a track record of exploiting players and neglecting their development. Little effort is placed in long-term football investment and infra-structure. Many professional players look to their agents for lucrative careers outside the country. Corruption is considered to be rampant in the football industry, where one scandal follows the other (Spalding et al., 2014). Each new revelation is met with a sliding scale of indignation, where the ends have often been considered to justify the means (“rouba mas faz” -- “steals, but gets results” – may be considered a compliment).

What cannot be tolerated is lack of results – under any circumstance. That is why the Brazilian national team has seen a constant stream of coaches: each time there is a major loss, Brazil reaches back into the past and picks an old someone to be the “new” head coach. Following on the footsteps of a rotating cast of leaders who were first seen as saviors and ended up being discarded, Luiz Felipe Scolari was chosen as head coach in November 2012, with the

hope that in 2014 he would be able to repeat his 2002 performance, when as head coach he had led the national team to its last World Cup win, where Brazil defeated Germany 2-0 in the final game.

Football can be closely linked to national identity (Bocketti, 2008). Victories are linked to the nation's identity, and defeats experienced as violations of its right to win. In Brazil, however, the definition of "victory" and "defeat" is different from other countries: victory is winning the World Cup, anything else (2<sup>nd</sup> place included) is considered defeat. The loss of the 1950 Cup to Uruguay by just one goal is still a vivid and traumatic memory, known as the "Maracanazo" (a reference to the Maracanã stadium, in Rio, where it took place): taking 2<sup>nd</sup> place was described by Nelson Rodrigues, a Brazilian playwright and journalist, as the country's Hiroshima. Years later, in 1998, becoming runner-up triggered a congressional investigation into the causes of that "tragedy."

It was with this strong thirst for victory that Brazil approached the 2014 World Cup. Having not won since 2002, the country believed that it was overdue for the "Hexa" (i.e., winning the World Cup for the 6<sup>th</sup> time). Hosting the Cup for the first time since the 1950 defeat to Uruguay (Malanski, 2016), the sense of history vibrated with desire to exorcise the *Maracanazo's* 64-year ghost: "this time the Cup is ours, no one will steal it."

As 2014 approached, however, people started to resent the escalating expenses, as it became clear that the Cup would be the most expensive in history, with a total cost of over \$14 billion. The preparations to host the Cup were criticized not only because of the contrast between the permanence of societal needs versus the temporariness of the Cup (Levy, 2016; Nobre, 2017), but also because they were perceived as perilously delayed and inept. While many remained optimistic, maintaining the traditional Brazilian faith that in the end everything works

out, others were worried that when the Cup started the country would be embarrassed in the eyes of the entire world. The preparations for hosting the World Cup and for launching the 2014 Brazil national team shared an important contextual characteristic: there was no plan B. Instead, there was the assumption that everything would work out, so there was no need to have layers of alternatives in case it did not.

However, in 2013, Brazil won the Confederations Cup for the 4<sup>th</sup> time and Brazil's head coach, Scollari, took this as confirmation that his style of football – aggressive and relying on the talent of individual players – would work in 2014. The assistant coach bragged Brazil already had “one hand on the 2014 World Cup.” Neymar, one of the young stars, won the “Golden Ball” award and was named “player of the tournament,” and Goalkeeper Júlio César won the “Golden Glove” award. Therefore, Brazil's hopes continued to grow as the Cup approached. Even Nate Silver, the famous prognosticator of U.S. elections and sports events, staked the prestige of his “538” organization behind the prediction that Brazil would win the World Cup.

On the other hand, lurking in the background, there was the dark side of the context: lack of long-term planning and player development, overconfidence, tremendous pressure to achieve an all-or-nothing victory, over-reliance on past successes and complete dependence on a thin layer of individual talents. If anything happened to the main stars, there was no plan B, no deep bench, the team would crumble. They had no experience playing with alternative combinations of players, and there was a big skill gap between the “stars” and their possible substitutes. The team would be really vulnerable if stars like Neymar became unavailable due to injury or suspension – a distinct possibility given Scollari's win-at-any-cost, foul-making, rough game approach.

As assistant coach Parreira had said after winning the Confederations Cup, the Brazilian team already had one hand on the “Hexa”. The nation seemed to see the 6<sup>th</sup> World Cup as a “God-given right” (Renggli, 2014, p. 10). In an eerie reenactment of what had happened in 1950, the entire country was already celebrating it, flooded with rivers of signs and merchandise commemorating the “hexa.”

It was the Hexa, or nothing. Temporariness meant that they were *almost* there. All they needed was to bridge this short temporal gap separating them from the Hexa: and the team would figure it out, they had the creativity, the talent and the courage to do it. That meaning of temporariness as *almost* there, and “already had one hand on the Hexa,” left the TO members almost unshielded from history, with thin temporal boundaries. A thin left bracket allowed the full weight of history to be, suddenly, placed on the players. A thin right bracket compounded this burden, by making the players vulnerable to the fear of the personal consequences of failure (defined as anything other than the Hexa). If a second place in the 1950 Cup had destroyed the goalie’s career, sentencing him to a 50-year curse, there was a legitimate reason for the players to worry about their reputation, and have fear of incurring historical shame. Such thin temporal boundaries allowed the players to catch the fever of historicity that was engulfing the country.