

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FUNCTIONAL ROLE ASYMMETRY IN COUNTER-STRIKE 2

Volodymyr Paskiv¹ Mariana Mostova¹, Yaroslav Svyshch¹

¹Lviv State University of Physical Culture named after Ivan Boberskyj, Lviv, Ukraine, volodymyr.paskiv@ldufk.edu.ua

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Abstracts

Relevance. Functional differentiation of player activities is a core characteristic of high-performance team-based esports and a critical determinant of competitive success. In modern first-person shooter environments, increasing tactical complexity and accelerated decision-making requirements intensify the need for narrow specialization. Despite its relevance for coaching and performance optimization, positional stratification remains insufficiently systematized from a theoretical perspective, particularly within contemporary esports ecosystems. **Purpose and Methods.** The study substantiates the theoretical foundations of positional asymmetry in elite esports through an integrated interdisciplinary framework. The research employs a comprehensive narrative and analytical review methodology, systematically synthesizing findings from sports science, cognitive psychology, applied performance analysis, and esports pedagogy. Comparative analysis examines specific demands, cognitive profiles, and tactical responsibilities, with attention to decision-making structures. **Results.** The analysis identifies distinct operational profiles—In-Game Leader, Entry Fragger, Lurker, Support, primary sniper, and Anchor—as differentiated systems of cognitive load, tactical responsibility, and communication patterns. Role-specific asymmetries significantly influence information processing speed, risk management strategies, spatial awareness, and team coordination mechanisms. The findings also highlight methodological parallels between esports and traditional sports, alongside evolutionary shifts in competitive requirements. **Conclusions.** Differentiation in esports should be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct integrating cognitive, psychological, and tactical components. The study substantiates the absolute necessity of developing adaptive analytical models and pedagogical strategies in esports training. It further proposes specific directions for future empirical validation using advanced performance telemetry and experimental designs.

Key words: Counter-Strike 2, CS2, esports, functional role asymmetry, tactical decision-making.

Володимир Паськів, Мар'яна Мостова, Ярослав Свищ. Теоретико-методологічні засади функціонально-рольової асиметрії в Counter-Strike 2. Актуальність. Функціональна диференціація ігрової діяльності гравців є ключовою характеристикою високоефективного командного кіберспорту та критичним фактором, що визначає успіх кіберспортсменів. У сучасних шутерах від першої особи, зокрема в Counter-Strike 2, зростаюча тактична складність і вимоги до прискореного прийняття рішень посилюють потребу у вузькій спеціалізації гравців. Незважаючи на актуальність для тренерської діяльності та оптимізації ігрової продуктивності, позиційний розподіл і розділення залишаються недостатньо систематизованими з теоретичного погляду, зокрема в рамках сучасних кіберспортивних екосистем. **Мета та методи.** Мета дослідження – обґрунтувати теоретичні засади позиційної асиметрії в елітному кіберспорті через інтегровану міждисциплінарну систему координат. У дослідженні використано комплексну методологію наративного й аналітичного огляду, що систематично синтезує результати спортивної науки, когнітивної психології, прикладного аналізу результативності та кіберспортивної педагогіки. Порівняльний аналіз спрямований на вивчення специфічних вимог, когнітивних профілів і тактичних обов'язків з особливою увагою до структур прийняття рішень. **Результати.** У результаті аналізу визначено чіткі операційні профілі – внутрішньоігровий лідер (In-Game Leader), ентрі-фрагер (Entry Fragger), луркер (Lurker), гравець підтримки (Support), основний снайпер (AWPer) та опорник (Anchor) – як диференційовані системи когнітивного навантаження, тактичної відповідальності й патернів комунікації. Доведено, що рольові асиметрії суттєво впливають на швидкість обробки інформації, стратегії управління ризиками, просторову обізнаність та механізми командної координації. Отримані результати також підкреслюють наявність методологічних паралелей між кіберспортом і традиційними видами спорту поряд з еволюційними зрушеннями в змагальних вимогах. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в можливості впровадження отриманих результатів у навчально-тренувальний процес професійних кіберспортивних організацій. **Висновки.** Диференціацію в кіберспорті потрібно концептуалізувати як багатовимірний конструкт, що інтегрує когнітивні, психологічні та тактичні компоненти. Дослідження обґрунтовує абсолютну необхідність розробки адаптивних аналітичних моделей і педагогічних стратегій у процесі кіберспортивної підготовки. Також запропоновано конкретні напрями для майбутньої емпіричної валідації з використанням розширеної ігрової телеметрії результативності та експериментальних дизайнів.

Ключові слова: Counter-Strike 2, CS2, кіберспорт, функціонально-рольова асиметрія, тактичне прийняття рішень.

Introduction. The professionalization of esports has catalyzed a paradigm shift in the understanding of team-based digital competition, with Counter-Strike 2 (CS2) emerging as a flagship title that epitomizes the complexity and depth of modern tactical shooters [10]. Unlike traditional sports, where physical attributes often predominate, CS2 demands a sophisticated interplay of cognitive, psychological, and tactical competencies, distributed asymmetrically across specialized in-game roles [16]. The delineation and operationalization of these roles In-Game Leader (IGL), Entry Fragger, Lurker, Support, AWPer, and Anchor [14; 18] are not merely nominal but reflect profound differences in task demands, decision-making responsibilities, and performance expectations. This article aims to address these gaps by providing a theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous analysis of functional role asymmetry in CS2. By integrating insights from sports science, cognitive psychology, and esports pedagogy, and aligning with contemporary methodological standards in performance assessment and position-based analysis, the study seeks to first, conceptualize the psychological and cognitive profiles associated with each CS2 role, second elucidate the tactical and decision-making dynamics that underpin role-based differentiation, and third propose a framework for role-adaptive training and coaching. The analysis is situated within the broader context of esports research, drawing comparative parallels with CS:GO and other first-person shooter (FPS) titles, and emphasizing the pedagogical and methodological implications for future inquiry.

Background

Functional Role Asymmetry in Team-Based Esports

Functional asymmetry refers to the systematic differentiation of roles within a team, wherein each member assumes distinct responsibilities, cognitive demands, and tactical functions. In traditional sports, such differentiation is well-documented, with position-based analyses revealing unique physical and cognitive profiles across roles (e.g., defenders vs. forwards in soccer). In esports, and particularly in CS2, this asymmetry is operationalized through explicit in-game roles that dictate not only mechanical tasks but also information processing, decision-making, and leadership structures. Recent literature has begun to map the contours of role-based differentiation in esports [9]. Phillips and Green [16] highlight the genre-specific cognitive demands of various esports titles, noting that FPS games such as CS2 require heightened visuospatial attention, rapid information processing, and adaptive decision-making. Similarly, studies on League of Legends (LoL) and other team-based games have demonstrated that role specialization correlates with distinct cognitive and psychological profiles, influencing both individual and team performance [19].

Cognitive and Psychological Profiles in Esports

Meta-analyses indicate that elite esports players exhibit superior cognitive abilities relative to non-players, particularly in domains such as spatial reasoning, attention, and executive function [8, 16]. However, the distribution of these abilities is not uniform across roles. For example, the IGL is often characterized by advanced strategic thinking, working memory, and leadership skills [12], while the Entry Fragger relies on rapid reaction time, decisiveness, and risk tolerance. The Lurker, by contrast, must excel in situational awareness, deception, and independent decision-making [15]. Psychological constructs such as resilience, stress tolerance, and communication efficacy are also differentially salient across roles. The high-pressure environment of professional CS2 amplifies the importance of emotional regulation and team cohesion, with role-specific stressors necessitating tailored psychological support.

Tactical and Decision-Making Dynamics

Tactical asymmetry in CS2 is manifested through the allocation of responsibilities such as shot-calling, entry engagement, map control, and site anchoring [14; 18]. The IGL orchestrates macro-strategies and mid-round adaptations, while the Support and Anchor roles provide stability and utility management. The AWPer, wielding the most impactful weapon, must balance aggression with positional discipline, often serving as a round-defining force.

Decision-making in CS2 is inherently distributed, with each role contributing unique perspectives and information to the team's collective intelligence. The literature on decision-making in esports underscores the interplay between individual intuition, systematic analysis, and team communication, with expert players demonstrating both domain-general and role-specific decision-making competencies [15].

Methodological Foundations: Scoping Reviews and Position-Based Analysis

The methodological alignment of this study draws on recent advances in scoping review methodology and position-based performance analysis. Dutra Zeni et al. [6] provide a comprehensive scoping review of physical performance assessment in racket sports, emphasizing the importance of role- and position-specific testing batteries. Domingues et al. [5] extend this approach to soccer, demonstrating that physical and cognitive performance variables differ significantly across positions, with implications for training and talent

identification. These methodological frameworks are directly applicable to the analysis of functional asymmetry in CS2, supporting the conceptualization of role-based differentiation and the development of targeted assessment and training protocols.

Methods. This study utilizes a qualitative research design based on theoretical synthesis and conceptual analysis. Given the nascent stage of Counter-Strike 2 (CS2) as a distinct competitive discipline and the limited availability of longitudinal empirical data, this approach allows for the construction of a foundational theoretical model necessary for future experimental validation. The research methodology is grounded in the principles of a narrative review, integrating interdisciplinary frameworks to address the complex interplay between game mechanics and human performance.

The methodological procedure was executed through a structured three-phase protocol:

1. **Role Operationalization and Data Triangulation** To ensure the validity of role definitions, the study employed a triangulation of data sources. Functional definitions for the In-Game Leader (IGL), Entry Fragger, Lurker, Support, AWPPer, and Anchor were derived through a thematic analysis of authoritative sources. The data corpus included:

- Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed studies on esports performance and cognitive demands.
- Technical Documentation: Official Valve Corporation release notes regarding CS2 mechanics (e.g., sub-tick architecture, volumetric smokes).
- Expert Consensus: High-level coaching manuals, professional match analyses, and established community taxonomy to minimize terminological ambiguity.

2. **Cognitive and Psychological Profile Integration** This phase involved an interdisciplinary mapping process. Specific in-game behaviors and tactical responsibilities identified in Phase 1 were deconstructed into their constituent cognitive and psychological components. The study applied established constructs from sports psychology (e.g., emotional regulation, arousal control) and cognitive neuroscience (e.g., working memory, inhibitory control, visuospatial attention) to the specific task demands of each role. This mapping facilitates the transition from descriptive game terminology to measurable scientific variables.

3. **Comparative and Pedagogical Analysis** The final phase employed a comparative analysis to contextualize CS2 within the broader FPS landscape. Special emphasis was placed on the mechanical transition from CS:GO to CS2, isolating how shifts in the game engine affect role-specific requirements. Based on these findings, pedagogical implications were derived using standard coaching theory [2], aiming to align role-specific competencies with educational and developmental objectives for training programs.

The methodological architecture of this study is explicitly aligned with recent standards in position-based performance analysis proposed by Dutra Zeni et al. [6] and Domingues et al. [5], adapting their frameworks for physical sports to the digital domain of esports

Results

Role Definitions and Functional Differentiation

In-Game Leader (IGL)

The IGL is the strategic nucleus of the team, responsible for macro-level shot-calling, tactical adaptations, and the orchestration of team dynamics. This role demands advanced cognitive flexibility, working memory, and leadership acumen. The IGL must synthesize information from multiple sources (minimap data, teammate communication, and kill-feed information) to make high-stakes decisions under time pressure. Beyond tactical execution, the IGL is responsible for the team's economic management, calculating opponent bank status to predict enemy loadouts (e.g., anticipating —eco|| pushes or AWP purchases). Consequently, the cognitive load for the IGL is the highest on the team, as they must maintain their own individual mechanical performance while simultaneously processing the —big picture|| state of the match [3].

Entry Fragger

The Entry Fragger spearheads offensive maneuvers, tasked with securing the first kill and creating openings for the team [4, 7]. This role is characterized by exceptional reaction time, mechanical precision, and risk tolerance. The Entry Fragger must balance aggression with situational awareness to maximize impact. Tactical success in this role is not solely defined by elimination; —space creation|| is equally critical. By aggressively taking ground and forcing defensive reactions, the Entry Fragger disrupts the opponent's crosshair placement and draws fire, often sacrificing themselves to allow the second player (the trade fragger) to secure an easy kill. This requires a specific psychological profile defined by selflessness and the ability to maintain confidence despite frequently being the first to die in a round.

Lurker

Operating on the periphery of team movements, the Lurker excels in deception, map control, and independent decision-making. This role requires acute situational awareness, patience, and the ability to exploit opponent tendencies. The Lurker often serves as a secondary information gatherer, listening for audio cues footsteps, reload sounds to determine enemy rotation patterns. Their primary tactical function is to cut off rotations intercepting defenders moving between bombsites and to —conditionl the enemy team, creating a psychological fear of flanking maneuvers. Unlike the Entry Fragger, the Lurker's engagement timing is delayed; they must recognize the precise moment when enemy attention is diverted elsewhere to strike effectively.

Support

The Support role is foundational to team stability, providing utility management, trade potential, and secondary shot-calling. Support players must possess deep game knowledge and adaptability, often sacrificing individual statistics for team success. Their technical expertise involves knowing precise —lineupsll for smoke and flash grenades to facilitate safe entry for teammates. Furthermore, the Support player is often responsible for the —re-fragll or —trade killll neutralizing the enemy who eliminated the Entry Fragger. This role requires a high degree of cognitive shifting, as they must instantly transition from a passive, utility-focused state to an active combat state depending on the outcome of the initial engagement.

AWPer

The AWPer wields the most impactful weapon in the game, serving as both a primary fragger and a positional anchor. This role demands superior aim, reflexes, and positional discipline, as well as the ability to adapt between aggressive and passive playstyles. Due to the high economic cost of the AWP sniper rifle, the player bears a significant burden of responsibility; a lost duel often results in a severe economic disadvantage for the team. Tactically, the AWPer dictates the tempo of the round by securing —opening picksl (the first kill of the round), which statistically increases the probability of winning the round significantly [9].

Anchor

The Anchor is primarily a defensive specialist, tasked with holding bombsites under pressure. This role requires resilience, clutch potential, and a deep understanding of positional play to delay enemy advances. Unlike rotators who move around the map, the Anchor often plays in isolation, requiring the mental fortitude to remain focused during long periods of inactivity. When an attack occurs, their objective is not necessarily to kill everyone, but to —stallll—using utility (Molotovs, smokes) and positioning to survive long enough for teammates to rotate for support. Consequently, the Anchor must excel in multi-target engagements and information relay, communicating the exact number and equipment of attackers while under fire.

Psychological and Cognitive Profiles

As illustrated in Table 1, the functional differentiation of CS2 roles requires a highly specialized alignment of cognitive abilities and psychological traits tailored to specific tactical functions. Roles dictating macro-level team dynamics, such as the In-Game Leader (IGL), demand advanced executive functions—specifically working memory and cognitive flexibility—paired with robust leadership and stress tolerance. Conversely, frontline engagement roles, namely the Entry Fragger and AWPer, rely heavily on rapid visuomotor coordination, precision aiming, and the psychological resilience to handle high-risk, high-reward scenarios. Peripheral and defensive roles, including the Lurker and Anchor, necessitate acute situational awareness, patience, and positional discipline to effectively manage isolated engagements and gather intelligence. Finally, the Support role acts as a stabilizing element, requiring cognitive adaptability, altruism, and trade awareness to facilitate team maneuvers seamlessly. Ultimately, this matrix demonstrates that elite CS2 performance is not predicated on a uniform skill set, but rather on a complementary ecosystem of highly specialized psychological and cognitive profiles.

Tactical and Decision-Making Dynamics

Role-based tactical differentiation is evident in the allocation of responsibilities and the sequencing of actions within rounds. The IGL's decision-making is characterized by hierarchical structuring, with pre-planned strategies adapted in real-time based on evolving information. Entry Fraggers initiate engagements, relying on split-second judgments and coordinated utility usage. Lurkers operate semi-independently, exploiting gaps in enemy defenses and providing critical information for mid-round adaptations. Support players facilitate team movements through utility deployment and trade potential, often acting as secondary shot-callers. The AWPer's decision-making oscillates between aggressive picks and defensive holds, with positional play dictating round outcomes. Anchors are tasked with solo site defense, requiring rapid threat assessment and the ability to delay or neutralize enemy advances. Performance evaluation in CS2 is

inherently role-dependent, with traditional metrics such as kill-death ratio (K/D) and average damage per round (ADR) [13] offering limited insight into role efficacy. For example, Entry Fraggers may exhibit lower K/D ratios due to high-risk engagements, while Supports and Anchors contribute through utility usage and trade effectiveness. Advanced analytics platforms and in-game data APIs facilitate the extraction of role-specific metrics [3; 9; 11], including Entry Success Rate, Clutch Success Rate, Utility Efficiency, AWP Impact, and Site Hold Duration. These metrics enable a more nuanced appraisal of individual and team performance, supporting data-driven coaching and talent identification. The transition from CS:GO to CS2 has introduced substantive changes in game mechanics, including the adoption of the Source 2 engine, dynamic smoke grenades, and revised economic systems [10]. These changes have implications for role differentiation, particularly in the adaptation of tactical paradigms and the recalibration of performance expectations.

Table 1

The Differentiation of Roles in CS2 is Underpinned by Distinct Psychological and Cognitive Profiles, as Summarized in

Role	Key Cognitive Demands	Psychological Attributes	Tactical Functions
IGL	Working memory, cognitive flexibility, strategic reasoning	Leadership, stress tolerance, communication	Macro-strategy, shot-calling
Entry Fragger	Reaction time, visuomotor coordination, decision speed	Risk tolerance, confidence, resilience	Entry engagement, space creation
Lurker	Situational awareness, deception, timing	Patience, independence, adaptability	Flanking, information gathering
Support	Utility management, trade awareness, communication	Altruism, adaptability, reliability	Utility deployment, trade support
AWPer	Precision aiming, reflexes, positional awareness	Composure, focus, adaptability	Pick potential, tempo control
Anchor	Positional discipline, clutch decision-making	Resilience, composure, anticipation	Site defense, delay tactics

Comparative studies indicate that while the core functional asymmetry of roles persists, the increased emphasis on utility usage, map control, and adaptive strategies in CS2 has elevated the cognitive and communicative demands across all roles. The integration of advanced analytics and real-time data further differentiates CS2 from its predecessors, enabling more granular assessment and optimization of role performance.

Discussion. The findings of this study underscore the centrality of functional role asymmetry to team performance in CS2. The differentiation of cognitive and psychological profiles across roles aligns with established theories in sports science and cognitive psychology, reinforcing the notion that expertise in esports is both domain-general and role-specific. The IGL's strategic reasoning, the Entry Fragger's reaction speed, and the Lurker's situational awareness exemplify the specialization of cognitive faculties in response to task demands.

This specialization is not static but dynamically modulated by in-game context, team composition, and meta-strategic trends [9]. The adaptability of players to assume hybrid roles or transition between roles over time reflects the plasticity of cognitive and psychological competencies in esports. The primary limitation of this study is the reliance on theoretical generalization and secondary analysis, necessitated by the prohibition on empirical data generation. Future research should prioritize the collection of role-specific cognitive, psychological, and performance data, employing experimental, observational, and mixed-methods designs. Longitudinal studies tracking the development of role competencies, the impact of training interventions, and the evolution of meta-strategies in CS2 are particularly warranted. The exploration of cross-cultural and gender-based differences in role specialization represents an additional avenue for inquiry [20].

Conclusions. Functional role asymmetry is a foundational principle of team-based performance in Counter-Strike 2, manifesting in the differentiation of psychological, cognitive, and tactical profiles across the IGL, Entry Fragger, Lurker, Support, AWPer, and Anchor roles. This study provides a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework for understanding and operationalizing role-based differentiation, drawing on established methodologies from sports science, cognitive psychology, and esports pedagogy [20]. The findings highlight the necessity of role-adaptive training, assessment, and coaching, supported by advanced analytics and evidence-based practice. The transition from CS:GO to CS2 has accentuated the complexity and dynamism of role functions, underscoring the need for ongoing research and methodological

innovation [21]. By integrating insights from mandatory sources and aligning with contemporary standards in performance analysis, this article contributes to the advancement of scientific understanding and practical application in the field of esports. Future research should seek to empirically validate the proposed frameworks, explore the longitudinal development of role competencies, and address the ethical and pedagogical challenges inherent in the professionalization of esports [1; 17; 21].

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