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Culture Change in Elite Sport Performance Teams: Examining and Advancing Effectiveness in the New Era

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Abstract

Reflecting the importance of optimizing culture for elite teams, Fletcher and Arnold (2011) recently suggested the need for expertise in culture change. Acknowledging the dearth of literature on the specific process, however, the potential effectiveness of practitioners in this area is unknown. The present paper examines the activity's precise demands and the validity of understanding in sport psychology and organizational research to support its delivery. Recognizing that sport psychologists are being increasingly utilized by elite team management, initial evidence-based guidelines are presented. Finally, to stimulate the development of ecologically-valid, practically-meaningful knowledge, the paper identifies a number of future research directions.

Keywords: change management, cultural architect, high performing culture, micropolitics, power

> Leading and managing elite sport teams is a multifaceted phenomenon involving the development of a vision, the management of operations, the leadership of people, *and the creation of a culture* [emphasis added]….[S]port psychologists should attempt to develop their knowledge and competencies across all of these domains of practice. The interface between management and psychology, together with the transference of knowledge from organizational psychology…heralds an exciting era…with important implications for developing service delivery. (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011, p. 238)

As identified by Fletcher and Arnold, expertise on the creation and regulation of high performing cultures is emerging as a key contemporary function of the sport psychologist. Given that group culture can significantly shape member cognition, behavior, development, well-being and performance (Andersen, 2011; Krane & Baird, 2005; Quested & Duda, 2010), this call for greater understanding is highly merited. Indeed, although the process has long been a component of elite team management (Lee, Shaw & Chesterfield, 2009) sport psychology has no explicit evidence base to support its delivery. Acknowledging the growing number of consultancy requests from the managerial staff of elite teams (Timson, 2006) and the pressure these clients are under to deliver instantaneous and lasting high performance upon appointment (League Managers Association, 2010), it is therefore crucial to examine and advance our effectiveness in this evolving area.

Certainly, reflecting contemporary Boards of Directors' fervent pursuit of the prestige and/or financial rewards associated with team success, management turnover has firmly established itself as the elite sport organization's reflex to results which fail to meet (often less than rational) expectations. For example, even though this turnover 'strategy' is largely ineffective and sometimes detrimental (Andersen, 2011; Audas, Goddard & Rowe, 2006), Zinser (2008a) recently revealed that, at the time of writing, the median tenure of those overseeing teams in the NFL, MLB, NHL and NBA was 2.9, 2.0, 1.4 and 1.3 seasons

respectively. Characteristic of other systems across Europe (e.g. Bruinshoofd & ter Weel, 2003), the average tenure of such figures in English league soccer is now 1.4 years; its lowest ever rate (League Managers Association, 2010). Alarmingly, 49% of those sacked from their first job are also never given another. Accordingly, sound consultation on how a new manager negotiates such pressurized conditions and rapidly establishes a culture which enables enduring high performance is therefore critical for enhancing the longevity of these individuals' careers and, of equal importance, the success of their teams, performers and wider organizations.

Indeed, as proposed by Fletcher and Arnold (2011, p. 236), "the potential to affect change is far greater working through performance leaders and managers, rather than…solely counselling athletes…[by]…creating an environment where high performance becomes sustainable across the team". Clearly, culture change expertise is therefore a highly pertinent attribute in the sport psychologist's developing armory. Certainly, further verification that this is a function of the profession can be found in acknowledging that practitioners are: a) increasingly utilized by coach/managerial "performers" (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf & Chung, 2002; Thelwell, Weston, Greenlees & Hutchings, 2008; Timson, 2006)); b) presenting on the topic at international applied sport psychology conferences (Hansen & Henriksen, 2011); and c) recognizing the theoretical and applied importance of socially-aggregated constructs in elite sport service delivery literature (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

Regarding this latter point, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) have highlighted that sport psychology's historical micro-level focus and sport management's macro-level equivalent lead to a "twilight zone" within which organizational, climatic and cultural issues are located. From a review conveying the emergence and importance of these factors in sport psychology, it is proposed that consultancy should therefore attend to a number of hierarchically-arranged levels; termed (in order of pan-individual impact): *organizational* (e.g., policy governance);

inter-group (e.g., effective communication/cooperation across sub-groups); *intra-group* (e.g., effective/unified sub-groups); and *individual* (e.g., role clarity). As such, optimization of the performance team's culture targets and permeates these latter three areas. Intriguingly, although this activity is not focused on optimizing the whole organization's culture (i.e., incorporating top level-governance and off-field support structures: see later comments), the actualization of consistent high performance and/or impression management activities deployed by the team manager may also, arguably, enhance the influence of practitioners in organizational-level decision making (thereby providing opportunity to optimize coherency across business and performance departments). Accordingly, expertise in performance team culture change, including its possible reverberation throughout the entire organization, is a highly enticing proposition in sport psychology's new era (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

Having identified that the creation and maintenance of performance-optimizing cultures is both a key task of the elite team manager (Lee et al., 2009) and an element which falls within the sport psychologist's evolving remit (cf. Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), three important reflections emerge. Firstly, what are the precise intentions and nature of this culture change task? Secondly, given the dearth of specific literature on the process, upon what foundations can practitioners base their practice and how solid are they? Finally, from an understanding of these first two factors, what are the implications for current service provision and future research? Accordingly, as "little is known about the effectiveness of applied sport psychologists' work in this area" (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011, p. 237), the purpose of this paper is to evaluate each of these areas in turn to elucidate the state of present practice and the requirements for developing and extending knowledge in the area of elite sport performance team culture change. Importantly, however, recognizing the semantic challenges that 'management' and 'culture' have faced in sport/social psychology literature (cf. Fletcher & Arnold; Shteynberg, 2010) and the novelty of the culture change construct,

definitions of our key terms are initially provided to frame the objectives and scope of the proceeding discussion.

The *Management*-led Creation and Regulation of *High Performing Cultures* within the *On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment*: Defining our Terms

Management

Aligning with the views of Northouse (2010) and Fletcher and Arnold (2011), as managers lead and leaders manage this paper does not distinguish between the idiosyncrasies of manager, head coach and performance director roles. Of course, this is not to suggest that important conceptual and operational differences do not exist between each. Rather, recognizing that all professions have reported the necessity of creating cultures which support goal attainment (Fletcher & Arnold; Lee, et al., 2009; Potrac & Jones, 2009), 'manager' and 'management' are applied generally to refer to any individual directly responsible for the vision, organization, preparation and performance of the on-field elite sports team (NB. 'leader/leadership' could equally have been deployed with the same qualification).

High Performing Cultures

Although "team culture" is well established in the sport psychologist's lexicon (cf. San-Fu & Bor-Shiuan, 2005) 'culture' remains one of the most vaguely deployed terms in social science (Shteynberg, 2010). As such, while we do not proclaim a decisive definition, to offer none at all would reinforce a significantly problematic issue. Accordingly, we apply recent assertions in sport psychology, social psychology and organizational studies (where the topic has received greater attention) by considering culture as a dynamic process characterized by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; San-Fu & Bor-Shiuan, 2005; Schein, 2004; Shteynberg, 2010; Zou et al., 2009). As such, high performing cultures prevail when the shared perception and action of elite team environment members: a) supports

sustained optimal performance; b) *persists* across time in the face of variable results (i.e., wins, losses, ties); and, most importantly, c) leads to *consistent* high performance. As a vital appendage, readers should note the subtle yet significant difference between high perform*ing* and high perform*ance*. Specifically, although by definition elite teams operate in high performance sport and may even achieve reasonable levels of objective success, this does not necessarily make them high perform*ing* (i.e., they represent those who consistently underperform relative to their resources).

The On-Field Elite Sport Performance Team Environment

As identified by Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009), the elite on-field team's interaction with its wider organizational culture is an important performance factor. Indeed, a number of studies have highlighted the impact of organizational aspects upon success (e.g., Gould et al., 2002; Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu & Neil, in press). However, while an invaluable line of enquiry, this paper centers upon the culture of the on-field team environment as a distinct phenomenon. Supported by common employee structures in the domain (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), this therefore encompasses the beliefs, perceptions and behaviors of team management, support staff and performers. Acknowledging that the on-field 'product' (i.e., performance) can govern the success of the whole organization (Benkraiem, Louhichi & Marques, 2009) the relevance of attending to this specific group is clear. Of course, this is not to say that the perceptions and actions of the wider organization do not impact its formation and evolution as on- and off-field environments do not operate entirely independently (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). However, the ecological validity of focusing on the group responsible for the day-to-day functioning and performance of the on-field team, including participative (i.e., players) and supportive (i.e., support staff) sub-groups, is clarified for sport psychology when recognizing: a) its bespoke goals and roles compared to office-based, strategic/administrative staff; b) the time its members spent in each others'

company; c) the extent of individuals' emotional ties through a shared involvement in performance; and d) the greater likelihood of requests from elite team management as opposed to top-level governance (e.g., CEO's).

Creating and Regulating a High Performing Culture: What Does it Look Like?

Having clarified the paper's precise focus (i.e., creating high performing cultures in on-field elite team environments), who knowledge is for and why it is necessary, what does elite team environment culture change look like? As many practitioners may not have engaged in the activity, we outline the construct's broad program-level requirements to aid interpretation of the proceeding assessment.

As summarized by Scott, Mannion, Davies and Marshall (2003), underperforming groups may require either a change *in* culture (i.e., doing what's already being done but better) or a change *of* culture (i.e., introducing new principles/practices). In fact, elements of both may often be required. Regardless, the first step is for the practitioner and manager to evaluate what changes are required. Recalling that high performing cultures perpetuate perceptions and behaviors which support sustained optimal performance, this assessment will be logically grounded in known perceptual (e.g., cohesion; collective efficacy) and behavioral (e.g., role effectiveness) markers of high performance teams. Consequently, intervention focused on enhancing these markers can then be planned.

Crucially, however, if the mandate is for a culture (i.e., shared values and beliefs) which elicits enduing high performance then a concurrent agenda is to ensure that group members consider such perceptual and behavioral markers as necessary for the actualization of personal and/or group success so that they: a) make day-to-day, moment-to-moment decisions which adhere to them; and b) regulate their prevalence both within and across generations. Indeed, cultures are a social cognition and so are governed by the members of the social group, not just the manager. Take the case of Manchester United FC who have

been ‘high performing’ for over twenty years under Sir Alex Ferguson, of which former assistant manager Steve McClaren commented: “At some clubs you get players who think they have made it. Not here. The manager *and other players* [emphasis added] don’t stand for that” (Dickinson, 1999). Accordingly, high performing cultures therefore emerge and evolve as a product of the interaction between management ideals and their targets’ beliefs and expectations.

Is it That Simple? Challenges of the Elite Sport Environment

As successful consultancy is always sensitive to the conditions in which change is sought, what particular contextual challenges must the practitioner cater for, protect against and exploit in order to deliver the above goals? Two such factors with major implications for practice are the elite team’s unique internal power relations and influential external stakeholders (cf. Reference A, in press). Although both characterize elite team management in general, their importance is extenuated for the newly appointed manager and his/her efforts to gain the initial trust and respect required for change of this nature and scale.

Internal Power Relations

Certainly, elite team environments are distinct from any other in terms of the nature and distribution of power. Specifically, performers often command multi-million dollar yearly salaries (e.g., those in professional baseball, basketball, football, hockey and soccer: Howard & Crompton, 2002), deliver performance in a wide public setting and are subject to significant attention from fans and media. Accordingly, how performers’ needs, preferences and aspirations continually shape and align with the new manager’s perceived performance-facilitating values and practices must be carefully considered (Greenleaf, Gould & Dieffenbach, 2001). Similarly, a concerted effort from a range of support disciplines is required in organizing and preparing the team (e.g., coaching, strength and conditioning, nutrition, physiotherapy, sport psychology, scouting). However, as each profession is

characterized by its distinct codes and interests, the threat of program-derailing conflict always looms (Collins, Moore, Mitchell & Alpress, 1999). Indeed, Reid, Stewart and Thorne (2004) have noted that interpersonal, individual-group (e.g., one coach and all other coaches) and group-group (e.g., coaches and physiotherapists) conflict can swiftly spiral and lead to detrimental impasse, rogue alliances and the perishing of a cooperated and collaborated approach. Consequently, for the successful optimization of culture, practitioners must therefore select, deploy and monitor strategies and mechanisms by which this flow of power can be effectively regulated to keep all players and staff satisfied, motivated and united.

External Stakeholders

As suggested above, the perceptions and actions of external groups with a significant interest in team success may also impact upon the creation and maintenance of high performing cultures. For example, the views of the Board are pivotal as they ultimately shape the conditions in which change is conducted through the extent of their facilitative support (i.e., resource provision[1]). Indeed, reflecting upon the high rate of sackings in U.S. professional team sports, including his own from the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightening (where he won the Stanley Cup), John Tortorella noted: "It's the owners' call. I'm not the one who has invested millions in the team….You work through the bumps and become a tighter team. But some owners are not willing to go through that, and the coach is out the door" (Zinser, 2008b). Significantly, due to many elite teams' involvement in regular competition - weekly in sports such as football, basketball and soccer – the Board's evaluation of the manager's product is in a constant state of flux. Accordingly, as its members will normally be experts in

[1] In some professional sport cases, however, oligarch team owners (rather than a number of Board members) may hold all the power in determining the level and extent of resource provision, carrying bespoke implications for the manager's efforts to ensure compatibility between their perceptions and those 'above'.

business and not sporting performance (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), managing Board perceptions of the team's strengths, shortcomings and requirements is crucial.

Similarly, as elite team performances are publicly consumed entertainment, both fans and the media are further key players governing elite team manager longevity. Certainly, due to their importance in generating financial, social and psychological capital, fans can command great sway in the way in which their team is run (Nash, 2001). Additionally, it is also well accepted that a favorable portrayal by the media can significantly shape the success of an elite team manager through their interaction with the fans and Boards' perceptions (Carter, 2007). As such, although Board members, the media and fans are not directly responsible for performance, the sport psychologist would be naïve to consider that efficient and effective culture change in the elite team environment can be successfully delivered without continually monitoring and optimizing the program-shaping perceptions of these stakeholders (particularly if faced with initially poor results).

How are we Doing Culture Change and how is it Doing for us?

Having identified the challenges and macro intentions of culture change, we are now in a position to consider the potential of sport psychologists' effectiveness in its delivery. Due to ever-expanding knowledge in group dynamics, practitioners are in a strong position to identify a number of process markers which may optimize performance. Indeed, among others, role clarity (Holt & Sparkes, 2001), sound coach-athlete relationships (Olympiou, Jowett & Duda, 2008), optimal achievement goals (Heuzé, Sarrazin, Masiero, Raimbault & Thomas, 2006), performance feedback (Noblet & Gifford, 2002) and goal setting (Sénecal, Loughead & Bloom, 2008) are all valid areas for analysis and action. However, after ascertaining the extent to which each may be required (a change of culture) or enhanced (a change in culture), the more difficult task is determining: a) how and when they should be operationalized; and b) how they can be efficiently internalized and governed by the group.

Certainly, significantly challenging practitioners' ability to package and implement high performing processes, almost all previous research has examined these markers' correlations with other pertinent variables (e.g., Bray, Beauchamp, Eys & Carron, 2005; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004;). For instance, a sizable body of work has investigated the link between pertinent processes and cohesion (e.g., Heuzé et al., 2006; Sénecal et al., 2008). As such, while practitioners are acutely aware of the general importance of specific processes, practical understanding of their optimization is limited (cf., Smith, Fry, Ethington & Li 2005). Furthermore, of the minimal ecologically-valid, practically-relevant work conducted, no study has considered such factors optimization as part of a new manager's program. Accordingly, although theoretically sound, the murkiness of applied implications leaves the culture change practitioner facing educated guesswork rather than solid, evidence-based consultancy. However, unlike the second challenge identified above (i.e., the internalization and governance of processes by the group), practitioners can at least take a small degree of comfort in having a recognizable literature base upon which to ground such speculation.

Indeed, as far as we are aware, only Schroeder (2010) has assessed how new values have been ingrained in team performers and staff. However, as perceptions of the coaches alone were examined and not the targets of change themselves, the work is limited. Perhaps because of these limitations, culture change was portrayed as a largely top-down process and the extent to which prescribed values were actually internalized by the target group and considered to cause enhanced performance unknown. Finally, as participants in this investigation led teams in NCAA competition, the deployed tools' validity for elite domains is restricted. For example, it seems reasonable to consider that written assignments (op cit, p. 74) could be met with much contempt and/or hilarity from many multi-millionaire team performers. So, what else can sport psychology offer?

Reflecting their reported ability to shape the way in which group members perceive and behave (Romand & Pantaléon, 2007; Windsor, Barker & McCarthy, 2011) the most applicable areas of current knowledge appear to be leadership and team building. Importantly, this assumption is grounded in both of these processes' reported association with cohesion (Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2003; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur & Hardy, 2009), arguably the most well-established covariate of high performance teams. However, upon deeper consideration, the focus, depth and applied credentials of leadership and team building work leaves the culture change consultant asking more questions than providing answers. To elucidate and justify these claims, the utility of our understanding in both is now assessed. As neither leadership nor team building has expressly identified culture optimization as a core research intention, we remind readers that the following critique is presented from the perspective of practitioners currently attempting to make decisions on their culture change practice based upon the most face valid, empirically based, currently available knowledge.

The (In)Utility of Leadership Knowledge

Reflecting the client group in question and the nature of the task, leadership literature holds obvious appeal for the culture change practitioner. Indeed, there is now burgeoning evidence supporting transformational leadership's value for creating environments conducive to success (e.g. Callow et al., 2009; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Zacharatos, Barling & Kelloway, 2000). By empowering performers to reach their full potential through "personal, emotional and inspirational exchanges" (Callow et al., p. 396) the approach offers much promise for harboring a group which is highly motivated to maximize its potential. However, while providing a set of principles which the practitioner may be wise to engender in the elite team manager (e.g., individual consideration; intellectual stimulation), this body of work, and arguably leadership research as a whole, is limited in its failure to provide extensive guidance on the situation-specific employment, deployment and monitoring of such behaviors.

Indeed, without an appreciation of their interplay in the context of a new manager's program, generalized implications support generalized practice. For example, from a study of transformational leadership in low and high performing ultimate Frisbee players, Callow et al. (2009) report that as "high performance expectation predicted task cohesion irrespective of performance level [this] leads to the suggestion that this specific leadership behavior could be encouraged irrespective of performance level". However, assuming the guise of elite sport culture change practitioner, what about the manager taking over a team which underperformed in the previous season and has lost its most influential players? Will immediate and generic deployment of this behavior promote beneficial perceptions amongst performers and support staff and establish the credibility and trust required for immediate success? Even if contextually appropriate, how should it evolve or be individually tailored? Acknowledging that moment-to-moment actions may have vast implications in change of this scale (e.g., tipping points: Kim & Mauborgne, 2003), relying on advice from correlational findings is inherently problematic.

In the only published study to examine leadership traits' in specific contexts within the same team (certainly of which we are aware), Höigaard, Jones and Peters (2008) applied Chelladurai and Saleh's (1980) multidimensional model to assess Norwegian soccer players' preferences for manager behavior in periods of prolonged team/personal success or failure. Interestingly, while preferences were consistent across players regularly in the starting team, they were situation-dependent for those who were not. Consequently, recognizing that culture is "continuously produced and reproduced in the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social and natural environments" (Kemmelmeier & Kühnen, 2011), the variance in these results highlights the necessity for methods and mechanisms by which multiple needs, motivations and roles can be effectively negotiated and regulated to support sustained optimal performance. However, due to the lack of longitudinal research,

potentially useful applied tools such as Cope, Eys, Schinke and Bosselut's (2007) identification of 360-degree feedback have emerged as tentative suggestions rather than derivatives of empirical testing. Furthermore, as research has primarily focused on performer-recipients (e.g., Callow et al., 2009; Höigaard et al.; Rowold, 2006), knowledge of which behaviors are most effective for promoting coherency and consistency in the beliefs and action of influential support staff members is also limited (Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2003). Finally, acknowledging the earlier point that culture is a social cognition, such exclusively leader-centric consultancy does not appear capable of comprehensively meeting the activities rudimentary intentions (i.e., that the group creates and regulates the principles of sustained high performance). Essentially, while our understanding of effective leadership is important for determining *how* culture change may be delivered, this knowledge is almost worthless if we don't know *what* systems, processes and procedures it should be delivering, *when* it should be doing so, *who* to and *why*.

The (In)Utility of Team Building Knowledge

As asserted by Bloom et al. (2003, p. 129), "if cohesion is the desired final outcome, then team building is the process to facilitate its development." However, while considered a critical process in performance optimization, significant shortcomings exist in the breadth, depth and contextual-sensitivity of its guidance (cf. Pain & Harwood, 2009). For example, by predominantly focusing on pre-season social activities without examining their impact on performance (e.g., an army-administered training course with a professional soccer team: Martin & Davis, 1995), our understanding of in-season, task-relevant, outcome-determining processes and mechanisms is threadbare, particularly for elite team settings.

Addressing some of these gaps, work in top-end sport has recently examined the utility of personal-disclosure mutual-sharing (PDMS) activities as a means of optimizing performance through enhanced social cohesion and a shared knowledge of teammates (Holt

& Dunn, 2006). Interestingly, Windsor et al. (2011) have also indirectly suggested the benefits of such intervention to team culture by reporting that shared perceptions between group members can emerge through the activity's ability to unearth and amalgamate individual-level values and beliefs. Such mutual sharing is clearly powerful and may play an important part in generating a team culture if used appropriately. However, Windsor et al.'s guidelines also encourage practitioners to "select an appropriate 'important' match before which the PDMS session will be conducted". Such sporadic intervention alone, especially when juxtaposed to critical moments, is clearly not suited to the day-to-day, power-ridden optimization and regulation of enduring high performing cultures. Indeed, given that pre/posttest measure of cohesion did not significantly change and performance worsened, it may not even be fit for enhancing its immediate targets. Taken alongside other 'firefighting' recommendations (e.g., after a loss of confidence: Bloom et al., 2003), the insufficient, inconsistent and short-term nature of elite-level team building knowledge seriously devalues its worth as a driver of culture change. More importantly, at a conceptual level it is also fundamentally inappropriate. Certainly, practitioners have already argued that management of group homogeneity-heterogeneity, relative to the phase of team development, is a more accurate predictor of sustained success than cohesion (cf. Reid et al., 2004). In short, therefore we don't seem to know enough of the declarative underpinnings (the why, when and even why not) of team building packages to be able to optimize their deployment.

In addition to timing, the need for use of such interventions as part of a targeted 'block' of work is another important qualification. Indeed, while team building is an important process in shaping group culture, Hardy and Crace (1997) noted some time ago that group culture paradoxically shapes the success of team building. For example, in Bloom et al.'s (2003) examination of such activities in elite University coaches, it was asserted that support staff "all have to be on the same wavelength for…success..[as]…[o]ne breakdown in

that machine could lead to a series of events that have an effect on the playing field". Furthermore, in their PDMS intervention guidelines Holt and Dunn (2006) suggested that familiarity with the team's culture is mandatory for successful consultancy. In short, team building appears to operate as a function of culture to a greater extent than the reverse. Certainly, as cohesion (i.e., the outcome of team building) is a shared perception (Carron, Colman, Wheeler & Stevens, 2002) and derived from "member's *selective processing* and *personal integration* of group-related information" (Heuzé et al., 2006, p.203), this is unsurprising given culture's governance of both of these (italicized) processes (Paskevich, Brawley, Dorsch & Widmeyer, 1999). Consequently, without an understanding of mechanisms which can subtly shape these deeper-level occurrences, team building alone will provide a variable, transient or superficial change. Indeed, Carron, et al.'s assertion that cohesion and performance interact in a positive circular fashion (i.e., when performance decreases so does cohesion) supports this assertion. Essentially, in an environment where performance outcomes are the most critical and sometimes only gauge of success, the utility of interventions which easily succumb to competitive losses and/or poor performances are insufficient for delivering an enduring high performing culture.

The (In)Utility of Organizational Change Management Knowledge

As sport psychology does not offer comprehensive, ecologically-valid knowledge upon which practitioners can base their work, where else might guidance be sought? Reflecting previous reciprocal knowledge transfer (Ayoagi, Cox & McGuire, 2008; Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009) and practitioners involvement in both domains (e.g., Jones, 2002; Warriner, 2008), one area of promise lies in organizational research's 'change management' (hereafter CM) literature. Defined as "the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers" (Moran and Brightman, 2001, p.111), its conceptual overlap

with culture change in elite sport performance teams is clear. Furthermore, unlike sport psychology, CM scholars have channeled significant energy into understanding and prescribing context-specific guidelines for pan-individual change and generated an abundance of frameworks for its delivery (e.g., Kotter, 1996; Mento, Jones & Dirndorfer, 2002; Price and Chahal, 2006). However, upon closer inspection, the frailties of this work render its current value as a supporting vehicle for elite team culture change void. Specifically, as conveyed by a recent review of the CM literature (cf. Reference A, in press), research to date has largely been atheoretical, non-empirical, macro-oriented, mechanism-bereft and unrelated to actual performance. Furthermore, akin to the critique of Schroder (2010), the leader-centric approach to its study again fails to elucidate the interplay between management and 'front-line' employees. Accordingly, Balogun & Hope Hailey's (2004) assertion that 70% of CM programs fail to deliver what they intend to is wholly unsurprising but also highlights that here to, more work is necessary to develop the answers we seek.

Reflecting one key reason for this scenario (cf. Reference A, in press), investigation appears to have been motivated by efforts to uncover the original and definitive 'brand-owned' strategy rather than the scientific refinement of previous frameworks. For example, while the *Lane4 Change Framework* claims to be "a scientifically rigorous platform from which interventions that drive successful change can be designed and implemented" (Warriner, 2008, p. 19), no evidence is provided on its analytic emergence. While the need to protect product IPR and market edge is understandable, the failure to submit such tools to peer review should be seen as a weakness. Contrast this with the England and Wales Cricket Board's use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a well researched and publicly-derived instrument (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Vaughan, 2011). In sum, while holding greater external validity, the multitude of flaws in the CM knowledge base render it a face-valid yet often unsubstantiated feature of the sport psychologist's culture change expertise.

Furthermore, as no work has been conducted (to date and published in peer review) in elite sport teams, the construct falls significantly short in accounting for the constant action and reaction of the key external stakeholders noted above.

Moving Forward Part I: Current Advice for Elite Team Environment Culture Change

Although sport psychologists have a clear (but practically limited) literature upon which to guide the enhancement of team performance (e.g., role clarity, task cohesion), the preceding evaluation conveys that the profession has almost no parallel understanding of contextually-appropriate processes and mechanisms which can: a) elicit robust, performance-facilitating values and beliefs in members of the elite performance team environment; and b) regulate and exploit the identified power fluxes and media/fan influence. Indeed, of Mohammed and Dumville's (2001) four areas of shared team knowledge (i.e., task-specific; task-related; teammate-related; attitudes/beliefs), we are not aware of any research which has sought to explicitly optimize the coherency of members' values and beliefs to support sustained high performance. However, recognizing that practitioners are already engaging in culture change with more requests imminent, what *does* constitute current best practice? Due to the limited nature of present sport psychology and organizational CM knowledge, the following suggestions are evidence-based but admittedly minimal, tentative and not all derived from research in elite sport. Indeed, a significant continuation and development of recent research (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Schroeder, 2010) is required before more concrete guidance can be presented. Nonetheless, adhering to our stated intentions, we offer the following recommendations.

While high performing cultures are a major component of consistent high performance, we agree that "no one type…is the recipe for success" (MacPherson & Howard, 2011 p. 127). Certainly, as optimal performance is governed by a team's bespoke history, strategy, resources and competitive context, the facilitative values, beliefs and behaviors of

its members will occur directly relative to these factors. Accordingly, the initial assessment should involve gathering the perceptions of a range of individuals across a number of roles and levels (i.e., players/support staff/previous management/Board members; senior/inexperienced; long-/short-serving: Lee et al., 2009) and examining trends in physiological and performance measures under the previous regime (e.g., body composition statistics; successful tackles; offensive rebounds). For the former, mutual-sharing meetings with an initial focus on performance-related issues may be useful for attaining task-specific data from a range of members simultaneously (Pain & Harwood, 2009). As suggested above, such discussion will be logically guided in pertinent processes and outcomes from the group dynamics literature (e.g., cohesion; role clarity; performance feedback) and further benefit from participant observation (Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Krane & Baird, 2005).

Indeed, as the utility of such meetings will be mediated by the honesty of aired perceptions, particularly if issues have never been openly discussed and support is not forthcoming from powerful group members (e.g., star players, informal leaders: Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke & Bosselut 2011), a concurrent and equally vital evaluation is that of the social milieu and informal roles. For example, Cope et al. (2007) have identified how 'cancers' (negative and malignant players) can distract other performers and the support staff's attention from the task, bring a sense of negativity, lead to the formation of multiple cliques, impair cohesion and derail performance. Acknowledging the time that elite teams spend off the pitch and practice area (e.g., meetings, travelling to matches, sponsorship and media activities), and therefore the volume of opportunity for conflicting agendas to operate, identifying which individuals assume/are susceptible to such roles (and all other informal roles: cf., Cope et al., 2011) is critical. Significantly, at a time when anxiety will be elevated due to individual- and group-level uncertainty (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011) but yet success instantaneously expected by the Board (League Managers Association, 2010), this analysis

will need to be highly efficient. Indeed, ensuring that the new vision, systems and practices are delivered from an informed, trusted and respected position is pivotal if any resistance is to be circumvented; particularly when performers and diverse support staffing enjoyed rewarding relationships with the previous incumbent (Ritter & Lord, 2007).

Certainly, regardless of a program's specific objectives, it seems imperative that practitioners and their clients initially create conditions by which the most effective and efficient change can consequently take place. Accordingly, alongside an understanding of the current social setting and the incumbents of key informal roles, parallel examination of current stressors perceived by members across the team environment may also be critical. Reflecting the intention to sustain optimal performance via group-governed principles, the most sensible and impactful approach will see a primary focus on pan-individual competitive and organizational stressors rather than personal factors (cf. Fletcher, Hanton & Mellalieu, 2006). For example, it is clear how stress caused by insufficient physical preparation under previous management (competitive stressor: cf. Hanton, Fletcher & Coughlan, 2005) or interpersonal conflict (organizational stressor: cf. McKay, Niven, Lavallee & White, 2008) may impede the rapid formation or optimization of shared, performance-impacting values, beliefs and expectations. As such, examination of performance-detracting personal stressors (e.g., lifestyle changes: McKay et al.) will be best prioritized for individuals who hold significant social power and/or pivotal informal roles. Indeed, intervention which alleviates personal distress in key 'cultural architects' (Railo, 1986) may be a pivotal precursor to the successful implementation of performance-optimizing systems, procedures and processes.

Having identified the path and barriers to consistent high performance in the client's environment, upon what principles can practitioners then support the optimization of culture? Aligning with our argument above, as the aim is to create a high performing culture and not just a high performing manager we advocate careful provision of resources into optimizing

the manager's leadership qualities. Indeed, due to the mediating role of performance (Callow et al., 2009), relative stability of personality traits (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000) and prevalence of competency-based models (Myers, Feltz, Maier, Wolfe & Reckase, 2006) over context-specific expertise, it is unwise to place such intervention at heart of practice. Instead, optimal effectiveness is likely to arrive from a focus on how the manager can promote members' generation and regulation of compatible beliefs and expectations.

Certainly, recognizing that the power relations described earlier do not fit nor encourage linear, top-down models (Potrac & Jones, 2009), equipping the manager with strategies that encourage performance-facilitating values to emerge 'naturally' from within the group is imperative. We place *naturally* in inverted commas for a reason. Specifically, it is well documented how elite team managers require a range of tactics to subtly shape others' perceptions to allow their program's to flourish (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004). Indeed, Fletcher and Arnold (2011) report that such 'dark' traits are crucial to these figures' success. So, through what mechanisms can a culture be therefore optimized without drawing attention to such socially undesirable attributes? As noted above, and reinforced through prolonged involvement in professional soccer, Willi Railo's (1986) 'cultural architect' concept represents one potentially effective strategy. Specifically, influential individuals who reflect the intended culture's ideals are identified and utilized to create direction, deliver messages and set examples to the group. These roles will be sensibly filled by those who hold notable peer respect, be it through inspirational performances, social standing or leadership qualities (Price & Weiss, 2011). Indeed, empirical support for the utility of this general principle has arrived from recent work in mainstream social psychology (Shteynberg, 2010; Zou et al., 2009) and in the examination of a successful consciously engineered, bottom-up approach to culture change at an English Premiership Rugby Union team (Cruickshank & Collins, 2010).

Turning to the moderation of external stakeholders' influence, we also strongly advise that significant emphasis is placed on the 'micropolitics' (Potrac & Jones, 2009) of managing upwards and sideways. Indeed, Vallacher and Nowak's (1997) finding that it takes significantly fewer steps to revert to a previous attitude than change one provides empirical rationale for this focus. Practically, regular meetings and informal conversations with Board members will aid the acquisition of necessary time, space and resources for program success (Schroeder, 2010). Additionally, undertaking similar impression management activities with the media will also be invaluable. Certainly, while interactions with this group are often time-consuming and irrelevant to performance, the extent to which their (sometimes preconceived: Reid, 2008) agendas can shape the perceptions of the Board, fans, players and staff shouldn't be underestimated (Carter, 2007). Pending a positive relationship, they could also be astutely utilized to deliver and reinforce messages to key stakeholders. Indeed, Sisjord and Kristiansen (2008) have recently described how beneficial media coverage can optimize sponsorship opportunities in elite sport environments.

In terms of interactions with the Board and media, practitioners should help examine, identify and deploy both covert and overt messages in anticipation of, and response to future events. For example, ahead of a planned request to obtain additional funding for strength and conditioning support, formal and informal mechanisms by which the manager may alert relevant powerbrokers' to this need before explicit discussion could be developed. Regarding the media, equipping managers with pre-planned responses to the inevitable interrogation of their program may also be vital. As suggested earlier, if faced with initial mixed/poor results, diverting this group's focus (and that of the Board, performers and support staff) toward external, unstable and temporary causes may be critical in keeping a fledgling program on track. Due to the lack of culture change-specific research, however, extensive guidance on these factors and their supporting mechanisms is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Moving Forward Part II: What Next?

While the suggestions above provide initial direction for sport psychologists currently, or soon to be, involved in elite team environment culture change, this guidance is undoubtedly limited and severely lacking in empirical support. Certainly, to establish a contextually-valid and practically meaningful evidence-base a number of research questions need to be addressed. For example, what are the activity's precise challenges and critical success factors? How do these vary across different sports and professional/non-professional boundaries? Through what mechanisms can the manager permeate and regulate group-driven values and beliefs? What expertise is required to enable this? Do managers and their targets perceive the same leadership behaviors and facilitating systems, procedures and processes as effective? And critically, how do all of the above evolve throughout a program?

To meet these purposes, early enquiry should qualitatively examine the perceptions of those who have delivered successful and/or unsuccessful programs in different elite team sports. Comparing and contrasting varied perspectives will elucidate both common and bespoke success factors and key mechanisms of culture change across a number of high-level domains. For example, evaluating the perceptions of team management in Major League Baseball and National Football League, where regular seasons involve 162 and 16 games respectively, will likely provide a number of lessons for general professional settings and insight into the contextually-unique challenges of each. Furthermore, with optimal cultures considered a critical factor by various management positions (cf. Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Lee et al., 2009), the study of practice in other pertinent roles will also bring significant theoretical and applied benefits (e.g., Olympic performance directors). Reflecting the lack of sport-specific literature and theoretical guidance from business-based CM, such enquiry should proceed from a grounded theory perspective (cf. Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Interestingly, grounded theory has also recently been identified as an appropriate approach

for advancing CM knowledge in business domains (cf. Bamford, 2008). Additionally, to fully clarify: a) current CM models' ability to account for the process in elite sports teams; and b) the extent to which bespoke sport psychology knowledge is required, secondary deductive analyses on the same data sets should also be conducted (cf. Patton, 2002).

Beyond such exploratory work, and reflecting our critique of predominantly leader-centric enquiry, it is crucial that researchers also assess the perceptions of change targets (i.e., performers; support staff) and external stakeholders described above (i.e., Board members; fans; media). Preferably triangulated with pertinent performance data, case studies adopting this approach to retrospectively examine successful/unsuccessful programs would notably extend knowledge by: a) optimizing the richness of data; b) embracing social complexity; and c) verifying management practice and its pan-individual impact. Importantly, while a range of ethnographic methods will enhance research efficacy, such work does not strictly align with the intentions of ethnography. Certainly, rather than "understanding…culture…from the perspective of the group members….[to] lend insight into…behaviours, values, emotions and mental states" (Krane & Baird, 2005, p. 87), researchers will be primarily concerned with the process by which a culture was created and not its outcomes. Accordingly, the value of ethnographic methods, in this instance, will be grounded in their ability to confirm the extent to which the culture under study is high performing (provided access is granted) and so therefore the utility of deployed mechanisms. Once this line of enquiry is established, researchers can then begin to examine emergent mechanisms in more detail. For example, analysis on how change-managers interact with the media to support the social construction of their desired values, beliefs and expectations in group members will likely provide a valuable contribution to the literature (cf. McGannon, Hoffman, Metz & Schinke, 2011).

Recognizing the need for sound theoretical understanding to inform practice, future research should also assess the extent to which a range of paradigms can accurately account

for culture change in elite performance team environments. Reflecting their recent coverage in pertinent academic and applied spheres, two approaches worthy of initial consideration are complexity theory and decentred theory. Indeed, complexity theory has been effectively applied by business scholars to explain management-led change processes (Theodoridis and Bennison, 2009) and further identified by sport psychology as a parsimonious approach for the incessant planning, acting and monitoring of sports coaching (Bowes & Jones, 2006). Additionally, derived from work in political governance, the utility of decentred theory (Bevir & Richards, 2009) in explaining the highly contested nature of culture change in professional sports teams has also recently received initial support (Cruickshank & Collins, 2011). For a more detailed description of these perspectives and how they may be applied by sport psychology, we direct readers to Reference A (in press). Upon amalgamating theory-specific implications with developing applied guidance, opportunities should then emerge to track real-time change as part of an action-research paradigm (cf. Kellmann & Beckmann, 2003). Reflecting the process' highly context-specific nature, the value of this approach will be immeasurable. Alternatively, if practitioner support is not sought but access nonetheless granted, ethnographic study (cf. Krane & Baird, 2005) could, in this case, be effectively utilized to observe, record and reflect upon an unfolding program of change.

Finally, in conjunction with process-specific knowledge, another body of work also needs to consider pertinent professional issues. Specifically, to what extent should practitioners provide direct or indirect services? How should *their* support evolve over time? What ethical concerns arise in advising on 'dark' practices? And what are the implications for the training and continued professional development of practitioners? In these cases, articles offering a critical reflection of support delivery will contribute significantly to the evolution of practice and the bodies responsible for overseeing the initial or continued professional development of applied sport psychologists.

Concluding Comments

The creation and maintenance of high performing cultures represents a stimulating new era in applied sport psychology. Indeed, through its ability to promote widespread, enduring, performance-enhancing change, the process offers practitioners a solution to issues which traditional group dynamics interventions and psychological skills training cannot match (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). However, acknowledging that the task demands: a) optimizing factors associated with on-field success; *and* b) internalizing values and beliefs across all group members to support their enhancement and institutionalization, current understanding in sport psychology and organizational domains is insufficient.

As a result, beyond general advice to identify and harness political allies within the team environment, boardroom and media, extensive knowledge on further mechanisms promoting group- governed, high-performing principles is not forthcoming. Additionally, recognizing that successful transformation arrives from the astute packaging of interventions and not just their content (Schroeder, 2010), an awareness of strategies for their introduction, monitoring and refinement in the specific context of management takeover is also not available. While representing a new dawn in service delivery (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009), sport psychology has therefore much to do before it can proclaim substantiated and evidence-based expertise in this area. Accordingly, we hope that the formal identification of future research directions stimulates progression from recognizing that high performing cultures are important (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011) to understanding how they can be actualized. Certainly, as the profession continues to search for means to optimize its effectiveness, the acquisition of such knowledge offers an alluring and rewarding extension to the largely sporadic and susceptible nature of interventions which constitute current understanding and, essentially, our reputation.

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