2017 Performance Coach Program – TASK 9
Level 4 Assignment – Cole Mooney

Character and Behaviour

Aim

The below commentary will seek to organise thoughts around character and the way that behaviours both create and reflect it. In addition to this it will lay out a framework for how to view an individual’s character within a team and how it can be structured and monitored.

Introduction

With the dawn of professionalism in rugby in 1995/96 it was very evident that there was a large change required in the sport firstly to bring it forward as a marketable, sellable on field product but also in a number of other areas. On field innovation was born out of full time athletes and coaches, players progressively got bigger, fitter, faster and stronger and the on field. We are now at a point where rather than having to pull from other codes and trying to estimate the desired metrics for athletic performance there is a large enough sample that these can be tracked down to the finest point. There is a developed maturity in infrastructure and capacity from State to State and a scale to that lends itself to the opportunity at success. The investment in the tangible is quantifiable and obvious.

The intangible elements of other programs are still however maturing as well as the integration of them into the overall program. This is in an age where the field of view for the everyday fan or person extends well beyond the sideline. It is very difficult to quantify if there has been an up or a down swing in public off field incidents but there has certainly been a larger more real time media scrutiny applied to it with the ability to capture a moment via a handheld device. With this being ever apparent and the gains in tangible performance versus competitors becoming harder to get in mature competitions, the word culture has become top of mind. What defines culture? How do you create a good culture? What maintains a good culture? Does the player impact the culture or does the culture impact the player?. Wayne Bennett when asked “What makes a good coach?” stated “good players”. When saying this was he referring to the on field talents? or the intangible elements? or both. Once Bill Parcells stated “If they want you to cook the dinner they at least ought to let you shop for some of the groceries”. Obviously the personnel that are on the team have importance and the make-up of the team.

Findings

How often does a player leave an environment that was less than optimal deemed as a “trouble maker” to go to a perceived strong environment with veteran leadership and flourished?. One organisation that has done this consistently is the New England Patriots. Consistently the Patriots have been happy to take a calculated risk on a disgruntled player because a large percentage of their squad are “high character” and are able to 1) model the behaviours expected and 2) aid in squashing any issues that do come up.
In 2004 they did it with Corey Dillon

Corey Dillon set a franchise record that still stands in his first season with the Patriots

They did it again with Randy Moss in 2007 when Randy Moss set the record for the most touchdowns in a season

Both of these players had a range of grievances with their previous organisations and their on field play suffered. They were both deemed to have “character issues” but when in a strong environment they flourished.

Consistently it seems that there is confusion around culture and the component parts that drive it. There are a range of different things that there is little understanding as to what comes first culture or performance, emphasis on talent or on culture, where does individual expression sit within a team environment in a team sport?

There are a number of items that a team on its journey needs to address.

What is your identity? That, that separates you from the competition.

How does your identity predict your style of play?

How does your style of play dictate the way you train?

What is your culture and how is it defined? How is it modelled?

What is the definition of success for your group?

Who is leading/owning this?

For this document I would like to place all of these items to the side for consideration elsewhere and instead look at the behaviours that make up a team mate on a successful team. Too often we look at players and apply flawed logic and bias based on past experience without judging the merits of the current body of work. If a player has learnt from past wrongs or experiences it isn’t fair to judge past state as present state. Rather than addressing the minimum entry point for acceptance in a team I felt it more prudent to explore the commonality of behaviours as they display character. It is my belief that the behaviours aren’t only derived from character but creating of it.

Firstly when we look at character how do we differentiate between on field and off field behaviour? It is safe to consider the fact that a risk taker on the field is likely to have that piece of their DNA play out of the field and by the same token if someone works hard on the field will they be a hard worker.

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off the field. I wouldn’t think this can be applied in uniform fashion because the same level of desire is not always going to be there. The desire to be a Wallaby, Rebel or Premier Player is likely to outweigh other things in player’s lives and the inverse would also be true.

Character with reference to sport breaks into 2 different areas.

**Performance character**: the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dispositions needed to achieve human excellence in performance environments-in school, extracurricular activities, and work. Performance character is built on "willing values" such as perseverance, diligence, and self-discipline.

**Moral Character**: Moral character or character is an evaluation of an individual's stable moral qualities. The concept of character can imply a variety of attributes including the existence or lack of virtues such as empathy, courage, fortitude, honesty, and loyalty.

Drawing this distinction helps to shape an understanding of the make-up of a player’s overall character and where any issues may present.

Performance Character and Moral Character have 3 Psychological Dimensions

- 1 Awareness
- 2 Attitude
- 3 Action  (Likona and Davidson,2005,p20)

For athletes that demonstrate performance character they have an awareness of their actions and the behaviours required to be at the top of their game and attack their actions with an attitude of enthusiasm and desire. When things get tough they are able to apply resilience. Alternatively when looking at moral character athletes have a an understanding of the ethics of a situation and an attitude of care, honesty and loyalty and their actions reflect this. To have team get to a point where they enjoy sustainable success over a period of time both need to be present.

In order to maintain a level of character and behaviour that is conducive to success it is often prescribed. Coaches consistently emphasize the key factors of performance and focus on making sure a player understands the technical and tactical skill sets that are required. How often with all of the different items that makes up a team’s identity do teams go as far as prescribing the behaviours. Developing character strengths should play a role in Player Development. Without Player Development it is impossible to have sustained success.

John Wooden is considered one of the greatest if not the greatest coaches of all time winning multiple championships and producing some of the best basketball players the world has ever seen.

He came to his own understanding of success defining it as below

“Success is a peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the best effort to become the best you are possible of becoming”

Once he had come to this realisation he felt obliged to then teach others to realise his version of success and so created the Pyramid of Success with the 15 building blocks below.
It focusses on the behaviours that need to be displayed to obtain success flowing in and out of Performance character and Moral Character with each block building on the other. It is often viewed as if not the gold standard a considerable reference point for coaches. It is process driven and views the end result as a function or outcome of a connected set of behaviours.

A lot of coaches talk about Negotiables and Non Negotiables for standards of behaviour with a collective ownership setting expectations in 3 categories

- Player to Coach
- Player to player
- Coach to player

With these then set in place creating the mechanisms for feedback on these expectations. This is where there can become ambiguity as often these don’t go far enough to prescribe and categorise the behaviour. One way to do this is as Mark Bennett from PDS Coaching professes

- The acceptable
- The unacceptable

and where appropriate

- The exceptional

If accurately described it should be self-evident which category the behaviour sits. In addition to this it would be worthwhile tracking what is improving, holding or worsening. It then becomes an issue
of reinforcement with a focus on the positive elements creating a reward system for any consistent exceptional behaviour and providing options for those that aren’t meeting expectations to succeed. There are a number of different ways do this that would be specific to each program and situation.

Urban Meyer a 3 times National Champion Football Coach during his time with Florida created The Champions Club that had a points system that lead to rewards including better meals, different equipment and some perks in treatment with the aim to leverage peer pressure to get conformity around behaviours. It was possible to move in and out of the Club so the pressure was maintained throughout the season. In turn he was very explicit when outlining standards to players and their parents. In a letter to players parents Meyer stated:

_I continue to believe that the University of Florida and your son have a mutuality of responsibility and accountability. When we are aligned and working to accomplish the same goals, success is attainable. Players, coaches and staff that live life the right way, attend classes and put forth great effort cannot be stopped short of success because they are too invested in making sure they cannot fail._

_All of us will work diligently to teach the student athletes how to make an investment. They will be introduced to core values by which they must live and abide on a daily basis. Honesty, Respect of Women, No stealing, No Drugs and No Weapons are the core values of our team. I believe you will agree with me that these core values can be values that can guide your son throughout his entire life and enrich and reward his family life._

In addition to this in the player manual handed out to players each season there are guidelines including

- You have responsibilities/obligations: not entitlements
- Do your Job, Nothing Else
- Selfish people fail

This framework, although coach driven creates a very firm standard of expectation but allows upside for a player to excel. During his time at Florida Meyer also had a Heisman Trophy winning, very high character quarterback that was able to model and champion the behaviours, Tim Tebow. Tebow was/is known for his faith and often performs ministry work demonstrating strong Moral character. On field he was a relentless competitor that would often carry his teams performance and while he had some limitations at professional level in the NFL he clearly displayed performance character.

Each program needs to address which behaviours and therefore the characteristics that are desired for their program or team but there is going to be a significant amount that would be consistent on any team.

DR Ralph PIM who was the Director of Competitive Sports for 12 years at the United States Military Academy in the TLC Framework for Greatness (2016) summarised in a concise manner the behaviours that are consistent and present in any sustained high performing sports team. For me this is a strong starting point.

_Championship Behaviors_
1. **Be Trustworthy**
   - Treat Others with dignity and Respect
   - Speak the truth
   - Do what you say you will do
   - Be Dependable
   - Be a competent and reliable teammate
   - Exhibit self-discipline and self-control

2. **Know what you want and pursue it with purpose, passion, and dedication**
   - Be deeply connected to a set of values and beliefs that drive your behaviors
   - Have a strong sense of purpose which inspires your passion and steadfast dedication
   - Live according to your team’s core values and guiding principles
   - Be fully engaged and totally committed to your teams vision, mission and Goals
   - Compete and give your best no matter what the score or situation
   - Improve everyday

3. **Belief in yourself and your team mates**
   - Be positive and optimistic
   - Keep your attention on what you can control
   - Maintain focus on the process not the outcome
   - Build your confidence through self-talk, visualization, quality practice and reflection
   - Focus on strengths rather than on weaknesses
   - Encourage, compliment and support your team mates

4. **Be Mentally tough and focused**
   - Embrace pressure
   - Demonstrate pressure and resilience
   - Learn from mistakes and setbacks and move on quickly
   - Demonstrate strong body language
   - Maintain composure and concentration in the face of adversity
   - Look for the best solution in every problem

5. **Make everyone around you better**
   - Value each Team Member
   - Listen attentively
   - Demonstrate caring and compassion
   - Hold yourself and each team member accountable to the team standard
   - Do not blame others or make excuses
   - Display trust in yourself and your teammates

**Summary**

The sum of a team’s behaviour is decided by its parts and is a direct reflection of the individuals within the teams character. These behaviours can be recruited or selected in to a group but often they need to be developed. It is an important step to break down the behaviours that are desired in a team to a point where it can become an objective discussion to pave the way for improvement and then continuously work to provide layers of feedback, player to coach, coach to player and player to player to create an evolving push for excellence. Character and the behaviours that are associated
with it can become the multiplier for any talent in a team but if left undeveloped can open the door to become a team's downfall. Ultimately people cannot climb beyond the limits of their character so it is an important part of player development and needs to be explored over the course of a team's journey.

**Conclusion**

“Character is a great indicator of success. We seek out the most gifted athletes who have real character. We would rather offer a scholarship to a young man with lesser talent but outstanding character than to a superb athlete with questionable values. In the long run, the one with fortitude will benefit the team more—he will work harder, sacrifice more, and have a better chance to reach his full potential and be a true team player.” Nick Saban, Head Football Coach University of Alabama