

Chief's Mana in action; a study investigating the team's perspective.

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Introduction

Team culture, and its relevance to performance behaviour and attitudes, has recently gained increased focus in sport psychology research and practice (Schroeder, 2010; Cruickshank & Collins 2012; Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2014). Cruickshank and Collins (2012) state that “high performing cultures prevail when the shared perception and action of the 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 consistently high performance” (p.340). Spink et al. (2013) found preliminary evidence that a positive psychological climate, as defined by the significance and meaning of the work environment to the individual, is also linked to increased athlete effort. Various researchers suggests that it is a difficult task to change, cultivate and maintain a team culture, that is the social and psychological environment, which promotes best performance (Cruickshank & Collins 2012; Schroeder, 2010).

Schroeder’s 2010 study investigated changing team culture by examining the perspectives of successful head coaches. The study found that, when changing team culture, head coaches appeared to focus on creating core team values; and that these comprised of relationship values, strategic values and behavioural values. The mechanisms these coaches used to solidify these values included recruiting those that shared these values, reward and punishment processes; and teaching core values using techniques such as role modelling, assignments, technology and enhancing player ownership (Schoeder, 2010).

Team culture will inevitably be impacted by the individuals in the team subscribing to the team values and behaving consistently with them (Schoeder, 2010). An individual’s moral identity has been found to impact how that player will behave on and off the sports field (Kavussanu, Stranger & Ring, 2015). In their study Kavussanu, Stranger and Ring (2015) found that athletes with strong moral identities were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. They also stated that high levels of moral motivation was linked to a desire to maintain self-consistency. This implies that people with strong moral identities and high moral motivation will behave the same across settings, and in the absence of an audience.

Other benefits of maintaining a positive team culture include strong team resilience and a high sense of collective efficacy (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2014, Spink et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy is an individual’s perception of their capability to perform a given task. The notion of perceived efficacy is likely to feed into performance (Allen and Sheffield, 2009; Myers, Feltz and Short, 2004). Collective efficacy was defined by Bandura (1997) as “a groups’ shared belief in their conjoint capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments” (p.476); and strong team cohesion and unity are likely to support collective efficacy (Allen and Sheffield, 2009). Myers, Feltz and Short (2004) stated that their study, investigating collective efficacy and team performance in football teams, reiterated the importance of building confidence in the team’s collective capabilities to enhance team performance.

In Morgan, Fletcher and Sarkar’s (2013) study investigating team resilience, they found that ‘collective efficacy’ was one of the four main resilient characteristics of elite sports teams.

They noted that while success experiences contributed to collective efficacy, so did the sharing of adversity by enhancing the team's 'fighting spirit' (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). The other resilient characteristics included 'group structure', which included the formal structure, and types of leadership in the team; group norms and values, which was reflected in a shared vision and purpose; and communication channels, which were reflected in frequent honest, open and positive communication (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). 'Mastery approaches' referred to a teams' learning orientation, which involved finding the positive learning during setbacks; effective behavioural responses, which referred to positive team actions to overcome stressors; and managing change, which referred to a collective response to changing circumstances (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). The final resilient characteristic referred to was 'Social Capital', which centred around high quality interactions and caring relationships in the team. This entailed group identity which was promoted by deep emotional bonds and closeness within the team; perceived social support, which was about the perception that others in the team would provide support if needed; and prosocial interactions, which referred to acts of selflessness in challenging situations (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Team resilience was defined as "a dynamic, psychosocial process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effect of stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and collective resources to positively adapt when experiencing adversity" (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013, p. 552).

It is thought that a positive team culture will support team resilience and enhance a team's ability to overcome setbacks. In their case study, of a rugby union world cup winning team, Morgan, Fletcher and Sarkar (2014) found transformational leadership, shared team leadership, team learning, positive emotions, and social identity were the five main underlying psychological processes that appeared to support that particular teams' resilience. 'Social identity' was defined as "a process where groups engage in collective action to develop a picture of what the group represents...social identity was characterised in this team through the presence of deep collective emotional bonds" (p.98). Transformational leadership referred to the building of relationships between leaders and followers, which optimises followers' potential; shared team leadership referred spread of leadership roles across the team; team learning referred to a collective understanding, or sense making, following setbacks; and positive emotions referred to "group-level positive emotions" (p.98) which were apparent during challenges (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2014).

The Chiefs Rugby Club represents a large region including Bay of Plenty, Counties Manukau, King Country, Thames Valley, Waikato and Taranaki. In 2012 the Chiefs SuperXV Rugby Club set out to modify the culture within its organisation to help achieve their goal of becoming a successful world leading rugby team and world class sports organisation. To achieve this they searched for a unique organisational identifier that would symbolise the core values associated with the creation of both great individuals and a great team. To be relevant this identifier also needed to draw on the culture of the region and the wide range of backgrounds of the people involved in the Chiefs. After much consultation including extensive discussion with representatives of local Iwi, the term "Chiefs Mana" was reborn with various associated symbols, terminology and metaphors. Chiefs Mana is typically promoted by the organisation as "a commitment to live certain behaviours' that individuals believe will drive sustained success". 'Jeff the Maori' became a key metaphor for Chief's Mana and he was used to embody the core values and to bring to life the associated behaviour and attitudes. Jeff, and what he stands for, is revisited every

year as new players join the team.

Mana is a Maori concept that is not easily translatable into English. It is often associated with English terms such as prestige, power, status, influence, authority, and spiritual power (Glossary of Maori terms, 2007; Moorefield, 2011). Traditionally the mana between the Chief and their tribe was reciprocal, in that the tribe empowered the Chief and the Chiefs' mana spread to the people and the land; and various ventures could increase or decrease the mana of a person or tribe (Moorefield, 2011). Moreover, a Chief, Rangatira or Ariki in Maori, was thought of as a "leader who has an ability to weave people together" (pg. 76, Glossary of Maori terms, 2007); and whose main concern was for the integrity and success of the land and its people. It was traditional that a Rangatira, or Ariki, would respond with aggression toward any outside forces that threatened the integrity and success of the land and its people (Moorefield, 2011). A full discussion of Mana is beyond the scope of the current research.

This pilot study sought to explore how current players, coaches and their support staff understood the behaviours' associated with their concept of Chiefs Mana; how these beliefs have developed; and how they believed their behaviour had changed (or not changed) to exemplify their concept of Chiefs Mana.

Method

Dr Brett Smith and David Galbraith in collaboration with Chiefs Head Coach Dave Rennie, identified a cross-section of players and support staff that represented long-term, mid-term and short term involvement with the Chiefs. These players and support staff were invited, via email, to participate by way of interview. Ten people agreed to participate and were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview, regarding their perceptions of Chief's Mana. Interviews took approximately 30 minutes and were digitally recorded. Dave Rennie was also interviewed to further assist the researcher to understand the background of the concept of Chiefs Mana.

A thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted. QSR International's NVivo 10 Software was used help code the audio interviews and identify emerging themes. The process included data familiarisation, listening and re-listening to the audio files; generating initial codes and coding the audio files; searching for, and reviewing themes; and naming and defining the themes; and transcription of relevant quotes. This thematic analysis used a realist approach in that it sought to report the experiences meanings and realities of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Given the sample size was small, it was considered that certain quotes and discussions may identify the participant so care has been taken to minimise this by considering all participants as one group rather than identifying players, coaches and support staff separately. Moreover, the sample did not lend itself to the participants being broken into long-term, mid-term and short-term involvement with the Chiefs. Instead the participants were considered shorter-term if they had been involved with the Chiefs for three years or less and longer-term if they had been involved with the Chiefs for over three years.

Relevant Findings

Four main themes were identified that exemplified the participants' concept of Chiefs Mana. These included 'Chiefs Mana is founded in relationships', 'In Chiefs Mana Actions speak louder than words', 'Chiefs Mana is what you stand for' and 'Chiefs Mana is personal, it's

living and evolving’.

Each theme is identified and defined, and followed by quotes that illustrate the theme. The first theme, ‘Chiefs Mana is founded in relationships’ was the biggest theme and has been broken into four subthemes including ‘building genuine connections and trust’, ‘reciprocity’, ‘everybody is valued’ and ‘connection to the region and its culture’.

‘Chiefs Mana is founded in relationships

- Building genuine connections and trust

All participants’ emphasised that Chiefs Mana involved building strong and genuine relationships with each other. They often referred to the team as a family, whanau or as brothers. All the participants’ directly or indirectly implied, that a strong bond and trust was pivotal to their team, their training and performance; and was founded in the ability to be honest with one another. Most participants’ mentioned that the more senior players were largely responsible for initiating this bonding process with new players by being welcoming and supportive.

“...you feel welcome, talking to everyone, everyone engages with you...they’re keen to help you out... You just see it in the way they train and treat each other...”

“...I feel very comfortable with these boys...Chief’s Mana is family oriented...we are all brothers, and on the field we work hard for each other... Chief’s Mana is our family and we wanna protect our family, our kids, and our supporters”

“...you have to be able to draw strength in the heat of the battle when things aren’t going well...understanding the core values keeps me centred...”

“...people have said they can see you guys really enjoy playing for each other...”

“the boys are willing to work hard for each other...that makes your bond a lot stronger...Once you’re in the Chiefs family, you’re involved in it like any other family, once you’re in it you can’t just opt out...[get to] know your mate, the guy you’re playing next to ”

“it translates onto the field too...knowing the guy next to you is going to empty his tank, and do everything he can, because you share a common bond, passion and love for each other ...”

“Guys need to be courageous enough...putting their arm around them and say brother that’s not what we are about”

- Reciprocity

All participants described valuing reciprocity in their important relationships and they acknowledged that they were involved in giving and receiving. Reciprocity was linked to their relationships with each other, their own families, the community, the region, the fans and supporters, and the business side of the Chief’s organisation. Many participants’ described how they enjoyed “giving back” to the community in particular; and some mentioned taking the perspectives of their fans in their interactions with fans.

“...you grow as a player because you’re giving back to the community... there could be mischief boys and you could lighten their day up and maybe turn their path around...”

“I enjoy giving back [to the community], it’s not an obligation...you feed off the people you are playing for”

“...get alongside kids who may not be travelling so well, can really make a difference for kids”

“...it’s pretty special...they’re [the community] proud of us...It’s important to connect with the community, it’s important for them and for us...it’s something we think about later and draw from [while we play]”

“[referring to the business side of the organisation] we are all family, they do a good job for us and we do a good job for them”

- Everybody is valued

All participants suggested that Chief’s Mana was not about hierarchy. Their narratives emphasised that every player, every fan and every small community in the region was valued and important. There appeared to be a desire to ensure that no one was taken for granted. Participants’ discussions also suggested they felt valued for their individual contributions.

[going to small communities] “it means a lot to these communities, we cover a massive area, for some people they are real supporters but it is too tough for them to come all the way to Hamilton”

“touch[ing] base with the people who support us...we draw strength from them in the heat of the battle...it gives you a reason to play and train hard”

“It’s not just about our team it’s about our region and all the unions that make up our franchise”

“...there’s always someone watching, they watch to see that you create opportunities for other players, they’re not just watching the ball when reviewing...at other places it would go unnoticed but here it gets recognised [referring to things other players do before a try]”

“[Jeff] is very personal to the team...my ideas were represented”

“...make an effort to get alongside the new guy...we have a habit of bringing the best out of young players...[senior players] recognise we are going to need these guys [new players] in the heat of the battle”

-Connection to the region and its culture

Many participants’ referred to Chief’s Mana being founded by a connection to Maori culture and the region the Chiefs represent. It was noted, that although most participants had an awareness of this connection, the depth of their understanding appeared to vary significantly. In general participants who had been with the Chiefs for longer appeared to

have more depth to their knowledge and connection to the cultural underpinnings and the region. Participants who had been with the Chiefs longer showed some concern that the new players, and the business side of the organisation, did not get exposed to this same depth of knowledge, particularly when compared to the 2012/13 squad.

“We are unique...[Chief’s Mana is about] conducting yourself in a manner that is that of a high ranking [Maori] Chief... Mana comes from within, without your mana you are nothing”

“in 2012 we took it right back, to understand the Maori culture of the region...the new teams don’t get that...Because of the ‘levels’ [of Chiefs Mana] people can get lost if it’s not revisited...we want them [new players] to connect to the heart of it [rather than go along with it]”

“Chiefs Mana is based on the Maori culture, there are heaps of Marae in the region, we’ve been getting to know about them...”

“a lot of the players are not from this area, its important they get to know the region they represent...[developing a] more personal connection to the region [supports Chief’s Mana]...”

‘In Chiefs Mana Actions speak louder than words’

All participants’ emphasised that Chiefs Mana was not directly referred to on a regular basis but that was inferred by the way people behaved and conducted themselves. They all referred to a strong work ethic that it was equally about the ‘on and off field’ work they do, and the small details, as opposed to just the larger tasks. Many participants spoke about “earning the right to play” rather than expecting it. This theme linked directly back to the relationship theme as many participants’

referred to how they behaved towards each other as evidence of Chiefs Mana. Moreover, most participants’ discussed behaving consistently throughout the domains of their lives, such as being good role models for each other, and the community, and being good fathers at home.

...it’s not labelled Chief’s Mana every time... the older boys set such a good example and you just have to follow it”

“...I set a good example by my rehab, looking after my body, how I train, doing the extra things and putting the team first... making sure the body is 100% ready for the game...welcoming new players and making them feel at home”

“...its Chief’s Mana 24/7...when no one’s watching you’re still conducting yourself in a manner that’s fitting for a Chief...”

“I want them to see I empty the tank on the field...”

“I see they’re [the business side] doing their best in their roles... I see Chief’s Mana in them”

“it’s chasing back when someone’s made a break...It might be simple things like cleaning up the shed after training”

“it’s [Chief’s Mana] helped me become more organised...”

‘Chiefs Mana is what you stand for’

All participants’ described Chief’s Mana as being associated with ‘being a good person’ and subscribing to an underpinning set of values, standards and morals. These values connected to the way they conducted themselves, made decisions and the way they developed relationships. All participants’ said that that it was not difficult for them individually to connect with these values because they had largely related to them on a personal level anyway. While these factors were sometimes described slightly differently generally the values, morals and standards appeared to relate to both ‘individual’ and collective responsibility; mutual respect; honesty; getting involved; humility; equality; work ethic and most importantly ‘team first’.

“...many people that go on to do well are good people...they are the ones who go above and beyond of what’s expected and treat people fair, and the way they like to be treated, and they have got time for other people and they don’t just stick to their own little circle...”

“we’re all equal, you’re not above anyone else because you’re a chief...[Chief’s Mana] keeps you grounded...humble”

“it’s an honour to be a Chief...”

“Rugby is meant to macho, but when people make themselves vulnerable...it shows how much they care about what we are trying to achieve...personally it’s not only made me a better rugby player, it’s made me a better person as well...”

“Living it [Chiefs Mana] makes it easy to be a professional sports person...when you’re the same person in and out of footy”

“the hard working good bugger...selfish men come have come in here and changed”

‘Chiefs Mana is personal, it’s living and evolving’

All participants’ interviewed thought Chief’s Mana was very personal to the team as a collective and to the individuals. It was perceived that all participants’ described their icon ‘Jeff’ in a way that suggested he was created to weave together the variations in their perceptions and to epitomise Chiefs Mana. All participants’ thought that Chief’s Mana was present in the team however they differed in the views about how strongly it was currently impacting the newly forming team, and themselves individually. On average the participants’ thought that Chiefs Mana was fairly equally important to the team as it was to them as individuals. On a scale where a score of 100 was deemed most important the average score the participants’ gave for the importance of Chiefs Mana to the team was 77.5/100; with a range of 50 to 100 and a standard deviation of 20.6. The participants’ average score for the importance of Chiefs Mana to themselves individually was 84/100; with a range of 60 to 100 and a standard deviation of 13.8. Participants consistently rated the importance of Chiefs Mana as higher to themselves individually and there was more variance in the ratings for the team. Participants appeared to think the rating for the team was lower because of the addition of new players to the team. It is noted that only seven of the ten participants were asked to complete this

numerical rating.

While all participants' referred to Chiefs Mana being founded in Maori culture they thought that each individual could find his own meaning and connection despite their cultural background. Those that had been associated with the Chiefs for longer described their own personal meanings and application of Chief's Mana as evolving, growing and deepening over-time.

“its [Chiefs Mana] team before self...it's part of me and I am part of it...”

“I feel it's a living thing that grows within you...as you grow and get a firm understanding of who you are and your place in the team then your Chiefs Mana grows...”

[it's a sort of faith] “...you have no real reason to believe other than you want to have, and live by, those values strongly...”

“Jeff lives and breathes Chiefs Mana...he connects the players to Chiefs Mana...players try to be like Jeff...Jeff changes every year but not too much...the heart of Chiefs Mana it is still the same...there's been small differences in the way it's been talked about”

“...the way that we train, the high expectations, that's what where're known for “it rubs off on you [if you are a new player]...that's how I was brought up in the Chiefs”

“[Chiefs Mana] gets me up in the morning to work hard with my mates...”

Other relevant findings

All participants' thought that Chiefs Mana impacted their on-field performance positively either directly, by their connections to each other, or by being something they drew strength from “in the heat of the battle”; or indirectly through the way they trained, applied themselves to the details, and made decisions with the best interests of the team in mind.

“on the field it [Chiefs Mana] is about competitive edge, pushing the envelope, never giving up...”

Longer-term participants' appeared to be concerned that they did not directly mention Chiefs Mana enough for the benefit of new players. However, while it was clear short-term involvement in the team was associated with a less personal incorporation of Chief's Mana, these participants appeared to recognise examples of Chiefs Mana in others without direct reference to it.

“You just see it in the way they train and treat each other...”

Based on the perceptions of the participants interviewed there appears to be a relative disconnect between the team and the business side of the organisation. The participants' comments demonstrated appreciation for the staff on the business side but generally they either only partially understood, or were not sure, how the business side of the franchise

applied the concept of Chief's Mana to their working environment. The majority of the participants' thought that it was appropriate for the business side of the organisation to subscribe to the concept Chief's Mana; and most of the participants' thought it was appropriate that the application would be different for the team and the business. Some of the participants' thought it may be helpful to share the teams meaning of Chief's Mana with the business side and vice versa, while others thought it was acceptable to not know.

"...I'd like to think it's something similar...they're hard working but it's probably different to a player's point of view..."

"...we all have to be rowing in the same direction...transparency is important so that we can continue to be aligned..."

"...they [aspects of Chiefs Mana] have to be different, the goals are different [for the team and the business arm]"

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the current pilot study it appears that the Chiefs SuperXV Rugby Club culture, which is founded on the concept of Chiefs Mana, is alive, and continuously evolving, amongst the players and support staff. Moreover, the Chiefs Mana culture has a number of the key factors present, which according to the sample of the team culture literature reviewed, are important in establishing and maintaining a high performance environment.

In particular the Chiefs Mana culture endorsed strong values and high standards of conduct. There was evidence that participants had strong moral identities and many participants' narratives suggested they were motivated by self-consistency and the desire to live by the same values on and off the field (Kavussanu, Stranger and Ring, 2015). Although measuring collective efficacy was not the focus of this study it appeared that Chief's Mana would provide the foundation for a high sense of collective efficacy, especially because it focusses on formulating strong beliefs about the capabilities of team as a collective (Allen and Sheffield, 2009; Myers, Feltz and Short, 2004). In speaking to the participants' there was a real sense of Aristotle's famous saying - 'the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

The way the participants' discussed their team experience suggested Chiefs Mana contributed to a positive psychological environment. As such participants appeared clear about their roles and suggested they were free to express themselves. The participants all described exerting high levels of effort into all aspects of their work, on and off the field (Spink et al. 2013).

Moreover, Chiefs Mana is likely to provide a platform for team resilience based on the factors identified in Morgan, Fletcher and Sarkar's (2014) rugby union case study. The participants' of the current study described positively influencing each other for the benefit of the wider team (evidence of shared leadership); participating in a process such as the development of 'Jeff' to create a shared understanding of what the team represents (evidence of social identity); sharing positive emotional experiences, such as collectively 'drawing strength', during challenging situations (evidence of positive emotions); and building strong, emotional and personal relationships between the leaders and the followers in the team (evidence of transformation leadership) (Morgan, Fletcher and Sarkar, 2014).

Moreover, consistent with Morgan, Fletcher and Sarkar's 2013 study, Chiefs Mana appeared to reflect at least three of the team reliance characteristics including 'collective efficacy', 'group structure', and 'social capital'. Chiefs Mana appeared to promote structure and leadership, a shared vision, open and positive communication high quality interactions, caring relationships, deep emotional bonds, support, selflessness and a belief in their ability to perform well as a team (Morgan, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). The characteristic 'mastery approaches', was not as identifiable in the current study but this is likely to have been a reflection of the interview direction rather than an absence of this characteristic.

Based on the findings in the brief pilot study two recommendations are suggested. Firstly, just as the Chiefs Mana role model 'Jeff' is revised every year, it might be useful to revisit the cultural roots of the term Chiefs Mana every year as well.

Although many of the players may not be Maori, or from the region, the history is rich and having an understanding of this history has previously helped players find deeper and more personal connection to the term. The team may consider investing in a video recording or a presentation from the team Kaumatua to help transmit this information. Alternatively 'assignments' could be used to help encourage new players find this information for themselves and perhaps present it back the larger group.

The second suggestion is that the leadership group further consider their relationship with the business arm of the organisation. They could explore questions such 'should/could this relationship be improved and what would the costs and benefits be'? Should/could we seek to enhance our understanding of Chiefs Mana from both the team and business perspectives, and again what would the costs and benefits be'?

These suggestions could also form the basis of future projects aimed at further enhancing what is a very relevant and powerful example of a high performing team culture.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The current project was designed as a pilot study and was restrained by limited resourcing, particularly time. Although a sample of relevant research literature was referred there was not the scope for a comprehensive literature review. The analysis is therefore considered preliminary. Other limitations need to be considered. Firstly the sample size was small and may not reflect the views of the whole team. Only those directly related to the team were invited to participate, therefore the perspective of the business arm of the organisation was not represented. Finally, as with most qualitative research, I acknowledge that as the researcher my theoretical background and experience will have influenced what was perceived to have been relevant and the way in which this information was interpreted. It is acknowledged that time restrictions also impacted on the current study in the data analysis stage and there was room for themes to have been refined further.

Future research with a larger scope would seek to comprehensively review the team culture literature and seek regional cultural perspectives. Chiefs Mana could be explored in relation to the business arm of the organisation and possibly 'how' the organisation could develop improved synthesis between the business arm and team. Concepts such as collective efficacy,

factors associated with positive psychological environments and team resilience, amongst others, could be further explored to with the view to ensure continued success, and or improvement in these domains. Future research with a larger scope may also use a number of methodologies, and may include qualitative and quantitative approaches, to collect and interpret data.

On a final note, as a researcher with a keen interest in sport psychology, but little experience with rugby, I was humbled by the experiences interviewing these men. It was clear to me how much they valued the sport, the team but most importantly the relationships they have. They were not only professional but inspiring, I had a number of 'goose-bump' moments, as an esteemed colleague would refer to them;

especially when the men spoke about how they had developed, and grown-up, to be good and humble men in this Chiefs Mana environment.

Lastly, I would like to document a special thanks to Brett and David for their supervision and to the Chiefs, players, coaches, support staff and administration staff, for being so accommodating.

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