



Should there be an 'I' in 'Team'?

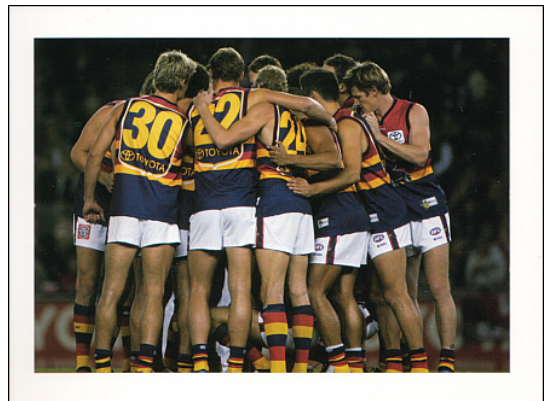
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One of the most commonly used quotes regarding teamwork is, "There is no 'I' in the word 'TEAM'". But how accurate is this saying when developing team cohesion and dynamics?

What makes a team?

A successful team is more than a group of athletes that train together; it is more than a collection of players all wearing a team uniform, and it is far greater than a selection of individuals who compete under a common team name. Rather, a successful team is made up of a group of individuals who decide to embrace a one-for-all and all-for-one attitude to achieve an identified outcome.



Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggested that for a sporting team to be successful they must possess a 'common identity, have common goals and objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communication, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent and consider themselves to be a team.' So does this mean that the individual, and their personal sense of self, must be sacrificed for the sake of the team? The answer is simple, NO!



As illustrated in the model below these team concepts when implemented effectively, look at each athlete's individual attributes and what they can value-add to the existing environment. Through this evaluation process a group structure is created to establish a common group perception of everyone's roles within the team. Having established group structure, the cohesion of the team must be addressed and subsequently group processes developed (ie. guidelines and procedures created). By constantly integrating the group and individuals' needs



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throughout this process, the opportunity for desired outcomes for all involved are increased.

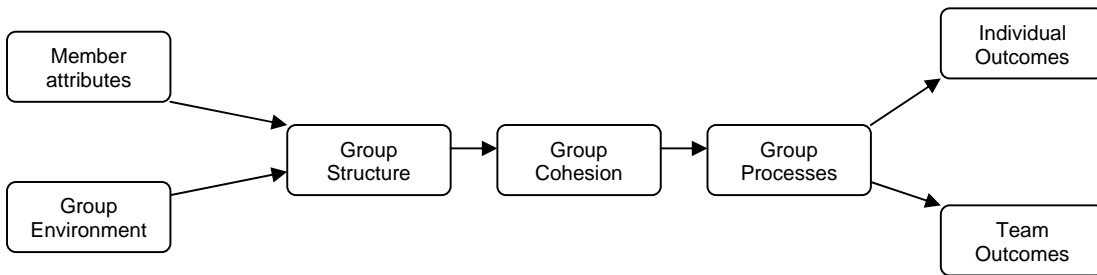


Figure 1: A Conceptual framework for sports teams

Why look at the “I”?

Each athlete within a team must feel a personal involvement with the group’s goals and objectives. An athlete must feel that their contribution to the team is of importance to the overall success of the group, otherwise their physical and mental investment (ie. motivation) in the process will be minimal. Furthermore, an athlete must feel accepted by their team-mates to fully involve themselves within the team dynamics. Acceptance does not necessarily mean that the team must be friends or spend all their social time together, but rather that they respect one another and are attentive to one another’s differences.

Contrary to the belief of some coaches that if you encourage the development of the individual it will detrimentally effect the team, athletes that feel that they are more than just a number have greater loyalty to that team and are more likely to invest more of themselves during a season. Furthermore, personal responsibility to team guidelines and processes are increased and therefore overall adherence improved.

How to include the “me” in ‘TEAM”

1. Explain each individual’s role within the team and how this is crucial in gaining success. By a coach stressing the importance of each player, individuals are likely to invest more of themselves in the journey towards team success.
2. Having developed team objectives, spend time with each individual to establish their personal goals and strategies so as to ensure they fit into



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the larger team picture. Like all goals, personal goals should be reviewed every month or so.

3. Show the same level of interest in your rookies that you do in your senior players. As a coach it is easy to find yourself spending most of your time communicating with the athletes that are crucial to your team's performance and ignoring those that you deem have a lesser role. Athletes are sensitive to these subtle indicators that their role is not very important!
4. Injured athletes can easily find themselves isolated from the rest of the team. Make sure they are included on game day by providing them with a role whenever possible (e.g., game analysis).
5. Discourage the formation of social cliques by regularly asking all individual athletes how they are going. If athletes communicate to you about a social clique you need to confront the athletes involved in the clique. Social cliques can often lead to a lack of endeavor to play for each other in competition. Try to encourage team gatherings instead.

References

Carron, A., & Hausenblas, H. (1998). *Group dynamics in sport* (2nd Ed.). Fitness Information Technology, Inc: United States of America.



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