

Developing Teamwork at New Zealand Cricket¹

A programme to improve team working in the New Zealand men's cricket team, the BlackCaps, hit the headlines in 2008 following the resignation of coach John Bracewell. Leading Teams New Zealand was an organisation which aimed to improve team performance through a range of teamwork and leadership programmes. In addition to working with New Zealand Cricket, Leading Teams had worked with Super 14 rugby teams the Hurricanes and Chiefs, as well as the New Zealand Breakers basketball team. Leading Teams was hired by John Bracewell, who stood down in November 2008 and was replaced by Northern Districts coach Andy Moles. Immediately following his appointment, Moles announced that the role of Leading Teams had been placed "under review" and would be "diluted".²

Leading Teams aimed to "align teams by creating shared vision and behaviours that empower all members of the team to engage in open dialogue. We develop leaders who model and defend the behaviours that the team identifies as non-negotiable."³ Its Performance Improvement Programme (PIP), which it said was a "unique and visionary training methodology",⁴ covered five key areas: coaching and mentoring, effective leadership, aligning teams, personal development and organisational development. Aligning teams involved understanding how culture and values affected team performance, analysing the current culture of the team, creating a desired vision and developing desired behaviour within the team. It also involved peer performance assessment and it was this aspect which created controversy within the BlackCaps.

Former BlackCap Craig McMillan said that during the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies, five players would be assessed after each game. Every member of the team would give those being assessed a score between 1 and 10 for their performance. Management would keep the totals and use them for the end of year review process. McMillan felt there were two problems with the system. First, players would be given a score of 5 or 6 even if they performed poorly because other team members wanted to avoid conflict. "The second problem was in regards to senior guys like our Captain Flem [Stephen Fleming]: it seemed that no-one wanted to give him any low scores. It was all because he was the captain."⁵

During a series of one-day matches in Australia in 2007, McMillan was one of two players selected for a peer review assessment, which involved other team members coming up with three words to best describe him. The group led by Stephen Fleming described McMillan as 'competitive', 'stubborn' and 'self-centred', which McMillan felt was unfair. "I left the room despondent, feeling that everyone had talked only

¹ This case was written by written by Dr Todd Bridgman, Professor John Brocklesby and Dr Colm McLaughlin. It has been prepared from published materials as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation.

² Sam Worthington, "Moles wields support axe: Less is more for new cricket coach", *The Dominion Post*, 6 December 2008.

³ Available at <http://www.leadingteams.net.au/www/303/1001127/displayarticle/1001286.html>

⁴ Available at <http://www.leadingteams.net.au/www/303/1001127/displayarticle/1001286.html>

⁵ Craig McMillan (with Neil Reid), "*Out of the park: The Craig McMillan story*", Hodder Moa: Auckland, p.188.

about my bad points and weaknesses. It really was just a shit fight – just name the worst things about a certain guy that you can....None of the peer assessment sat well with me at all so I never bought into it. But I know some of the other guys did, especially the leadership group. I would guess it was in their best interests to do just that.”⁶

Former New Zealand captain Martin Crowe was highly critical of the programme, saying that none of the Leading Teams experts had played test cricket. “In the dressing room there is a bunch of consultants handing out forms at the end of each day’s play. They don’t know anything about cricket, by the way, but they are asking players to fill in forms assessing each other’s behaviour and then have a peer assessment. I’m sorry, but this is not the way to go about allowing cricketers to express themselves. It plays with young kids’ minds. Imagine yourself being 19 and being asked to assess other people in the team’s behaviour.”⁷

Another former New Zealand captain, Ken Rutherford, agreed with Martin Crowe and said there were better ways to build a team culture. “This sort of assessment stuff doesn’t impress me, especially at the end of a day. Look, there’s blokes you are never going to get on with but it’s amazing what a six pack of Speights and a talk with all the guys will achieve at the end of the day....I know it’s old fashioned but when you’re in a team guess what, you’re in a team. You’re all part of it and don’t need idiots from Fantasyland telling you to assess your mates. It’s whacky and that’s being kind.”⁸

John Bracewell said the Leading Teams philosophy helped combat a ‘coffee group mentality’ within the team. “If you are going to say something, say it to his face rather than to little groups. I find that cricketers are some of the worst gossips and the least in your face, confrontational people that I have ever met. We don’t mind sitting over a coffee and bitching and moaning about Craig [McMillan] not having gone for a run or eating crap food, but no one is prepared to go and talk to him about it. We seem to have this thing going ‘No, that is management; they should be dealing with these sorts of things’”.⁹

New Zealand fast bowler Chris Martin also defended the peer assessment programme. “We’re not trying to change personalities or the way people think, it’s about open communication about what’s expected of them. Leading Teams doesn’t go any further than that. We senior players believe that with open communication you don’t ignore things, they’re addressed straight away. And if things are handled appropriately, younger guys learn more quickly about the game and how it should be played.”¹⁰

⁶ Craig McMillan (with Neil Reid), “*Out of the park: The Craig McMillan story*”, Hodder Moa: Auckland, p.184.

⁷ John Matheson, “It’s a farce”, *Sunday News*, 7 December 2008.

⁸ Doug Golightly, “No place for mumbo jumbo”, *Sunday News*, 7 December 2008.

⁹ Craig McMillan (with Neil Reid), “*Out of the park: The Craig McMillan story*”, Hodder Moa: Auckland, p.182.

¹⁰ Michael Donaldson, “Black Caps discard backs ‘Leading Teams’”, *Sunday Star Times*, 14 December 2008.