2.2 Group Climate and Individual Development

We have already explored the main dimension of high performance leadership: productivity. In this section, we will address the two other dimensions: group climate and individual development.

Let's begin with a dimension that is ever more salient within different organizations, and becomes even more important if we keep in mind the preferences of new generations: group climate.

“Group climate is the social and physical environment that results from the influence of internal and external factors on the life of the group" (Contreras, 2012, p. 1).

Why should a high performance leader address group climate after having put a lot of effort into developing productivity? We will list some answers to this question:

- It adds sustainability to the previously achieved productivity.
- It encourages the recovery of team productivity.
- It gives the team stability.
- It increases the sense of enjoyment and flow for each team member.
- It promotes the growth and development of team members.
- It enables daily team interaction without significant conflicts.
- It encourages participation and growth among team members.
- It creates control, and increases belonging and identification within the team.

Managing group climate is no longer a decision according to the leader’s preferences; these days, many organizations in different fields measure the satisfaction of their members and compare them using internationally validated scales.

In the next paragraphs we will explain the three core ideas of group climate:

- Internal norms for coexistence.
- Social cohesion and task cohesion.
- Communication within the group.

2.2.1 Internal Norms for Coexistence

> A norm is a level of implementation, a behavioral pattern or a belief. A group can formally or informally establish norms, each of which carries with it specific expectations and behaviors that presumably shape the group members' actions. Normally, people feel pressure to adhere to group norms. Sometimes, a group uses positive or negative sanctions to enforce conformity with said norms (Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 192).

Norms, together with roles, form the central structure of every team. Roles yield productivity, norms yield stability.

Even if these concepts are central and basic, in our experience as consultants in sports and organizational fields, we have often found a lack of norms that will ensure the team's functioning. Putting the stability of individual factors to one side—for example: each team member's common sense—is a long way off from many of the specific demands and suggestions of high performance. The leader must manage the team's internal norms to ensure its stability. Teams become less stable when:

- They lack internal norms.
- They disregard existing norms.
- There are no reinforcements related to compliance or noncompliance with norms.
- The team members do not gain any advantages by complying with norms.
- Leaders do not adhere to norm compliance.

Whenever possible, we recommend making norms-related decisions consensually, with everyone present and in a participative manner. This is an important opportunity to achieve greater adherence to compliance.

It is important that each team member can participate in the selection and formulation of the norms that will govern the team's behavior. Each member can be informed of the benefits of complying with norms, such that the whole team can choose the positive and negative reinforcements for cases of noncompliance and compliance with norms. This last point is very important.

When it is the team who has chosen the reinforcements, it ensures the leader's impartiality. The leader can only follow the norms and control their compliance, which is no small task, but which is much more

simple when the whole team chose and developed the norms, know the benefits and picked the reinforcements.

In this vein, it is recommendable that the leader sets the number of norms. It is not necessary to have dozens of rules that lock the team's behavior in place; with less than 10 norms, perfect functioning can be ensured. Too many norms can confuse and tire out the team. Core norms that provide fairness, coordination, and a sense of belonging should be chosen.

Zander (1982 as cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 193) developed a few additional methods for sports leaders to establish and reinforce group norms:

- Showing team members the way in which group standards (norms) can contribute to more effective performance and greater team unity.
- Assessing the acceptance of team standards and rewarding those that adhere to them while sanctioning those who do not.
- Making each team member take note of the way in which their contribution to the development and maintenance of standards plays a part in the team's successes.

Tutko (1984 as cited in De Diego and Sagredo, 1993, pp. 228-229) captures a very interesting disciplinary code for the coach's action within the realm of norms or rules:

- The rule must be appropriate and applicable; closely related to the sports objective and not to the athletes' personal lives.
- The rule must be fair, but may be flexible if the coach considers it fitting for a certain athlete or situation.
- The rule must apply to everyone, without favoritism or benefiting some athletes at the expense of others.
- The team must be completely informed about what can happen if the rules are broken, so that sanctions cannot create negative feelings towards the coach or be used against them.
- Team members must feel like they are part of the entity that established the rules; commitment will be greater because each athlete has some responsibility for the norms.
- For the solution to be effective, it should be imposed immediately and according to the offense, so that the

athlete registers the sanction as relevant to their offense and not just according to the coach's whim.

High performance demands order and it is norms that order the team and its members and give them stability. The leader should have clarity and strong communication skills, both for defining, implementing and establishing norm compliance as well as for applying reinforcement when necessary. A high performance leader must constantly train themselves to meet the circumstances.

For his part, Marcelo Bielsa (Rojas Rojas, 2015. pp. 13-14) set out ten norms for all players on the Chilean national soccer team to follow:

1. All national team members are qualified to be on the team.
2. All players will be treated equally by the coaching staff.
3. Al players share the same responsibilities.
4. No player has special privileges.
5. Never place an individual interest above the interests of the team.
6. The national team is the most important thing for the player who must work hard to remain part of it.
7. Schedules must be strictly respected.
8. Under no circumstances is the consumption of alcohol allowed.
9. The player's will to always do what is demanded of him is not negotiable, both on and off the field.
10. It is a very important prerequisite for a player who wants to become part of the national team to have a desire to wear the jersey and honorably represent his country.

2.2.2 Task Cohesion and Social Cohesion

Everyone understands the concept of cohesion in team management, but few understand specifically what it means, and its actual impact on team climate and how it can be improved. Below, we will explore some ideas related to these concepts.

In 1950, Festinger, Shacter and Back defined cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group" (as cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 206).

Cohesion is the term that best defines the team's drive towards its objective. It is considered that a team has high cohesion when it is characterized by:

- Mutual respect, enabling each athlete to satisfy their individual needs, and appreciating the same for their team mates.
- A sense of belonging, as a point of reinforcement for each athlete, which is seen as positive compensation for the rest of the misplaced effort.
- The importance of community, as well as the goals to be met, the team's own philosophy, the belief in the team's own verbal and nonverbal dictionary, etc. (De Diego and Sagredo, 1993; pp. 229-230).

Our experience with different organizational and sports teams allows us to clarify some concepts and actions that we believe are worth considering:

- People are unfamiliar with different types of cohesion.
- They mix up task cohesion and social cohesion.
- Its absence is more noticeable than its presence.
- People do not know how to stimulate it.
- People are unaware of its impact.

There are primarily two types of cohesion: task cohesion and social cohesion. Social cohesion is more visible and more sought after by many leaders. It refers to the quality of relationships in the team and the level of camaraderie and friendliness; that is, it is a purely relational and affinitive approach to cohesion.

Task cohesion, in turn, refers to the interdependence and interrelationship between team members working towards meeting team objectives. This approach to cohesion is mainly associated with productivity.

It is very important to keep in mind that many leaders confuse priorities when taking action related to these two types of cohesion. Social activities are commonly enacted in order to strengthen bonds (social cohesion), but task cohesion should be encouraged with equal or greater intensity. Task cohesion enhances social cohesion, and not the reverse.

Findings on cohesion-performance:

- In general, positive relationships are observed between cohesion and performance of interactive tasks.
- In general, there are more positive relationships observed between task cohesion and performance than between social cohesion and performance.
- Performance seems to have a stronger effect on cohesion than cohesion has on performance.
- It would appear that the relationship between cohesion and performance is circular, such that performance success elicits an increase in cohesion which in turn leads to an increase in performance (Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 217).

Barriers to group cohesion:

- An incompatibility between personalities within the team.
- A conflict between social roles and tasks among team members.
- A communication breakdown between group members, or between group members and the leader.
- One or more group member's struggle to take power.
- Frequent rotation and mobility of group members.
- Disagreement on the group's objectives and goals (Weinberg and Gould, 1996 p. 221).

In order to create higher levels of task cohesion and social cohesion within the group, it is recommended that the leader:

- Honestly assign roles within the team.
- Clarify expectations with each team member.
- Present clear norms for the whole team.
- Reward cooperative behaviors within the team.
- Encourage interdependence among team members.
- Reward respect for team values.
- Anticipate and quickly respond to interpersonal conflicts.

- Keep communication channels open with each athlete and with the team.
- Perform recreational activities outside of work.

High performance also demands that the leader use concrete measures to attend to and encourage cohesion. It is an almost irreversible error to only begin to attend to cohesion when a conflict arises within the group or after a lack of cooperation.

2.2.3 Team Communication Training

With the goal of optimizing group climate, the leader will need to prepare coexistence norms and use concrete measures to encourage task cohesion and social cohesion. Here we will make a qualitative leap: the best team climate is achieved through proper communication management.

Communication enables connection with all team members, and a leader facilitates, encourages or impedes the communication network. High performance teams –as mentioned in previous paragraphs– demand that the leader exhibit communication expertise. Alberti and Emmons (1978, as cited in Caballo, 2010, p. 75) encourage a fundamental honesty in interpersonal communication as well as spontaneity of expression.

In this section we not only refer to the communication between the leader and the group, but also to that which occurs among peers, among team members.

Interpersonal conflict management requires effective, concrete and practical communication responses, developed by the group.

A high performance leader is also responsible for the quality of team communication. Great teams discuss objectives and tasks much more than interpersonal relationships on the team. The leader must be skilled enough to anticipate possible conflicts and must prepare new channels for conversations and create consensual procedures with the team to resolve internal differences.

Unresolved interpersonal conflicts, whether they are rooted in tasks or in relationships, directly affect the group climate. The leader needs to solve them and demonstrate to the team the necessary mechanisms for resolving differences.

As a specific means to address this, we propose two tools to resolve interpersonal conflicts within the team that can be of service to high performance leaders: the criticism sandwich and confrontation.

Some research indicates that the sandwich method is the most effective way to deliver criticism (Smith, Smoll and Hunt, 1977, as cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1996 p. 268).

The sandwich method is a technique that allows giving constructive feedback simply and effectively. It consists of three sequential elements:

1) A positive statement.

2) Future-oriented instructions.

3) A compliment (Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 268).

Often, when a team member makes a mistake or has a difference with some member, they take a defensive position. Thus, whoever wants to express criticism, should do so starting by appreciating a positive point about the other person, the relationship they have or their performance; in this way, tensions will be reduced and the other person will receive the feedback in the best way possible. If one party begins by directing criticism without this preliminary peaceful introduction, they run the risk of not being heard and of compounding the conflict. It is also necessary to explain where one is speaking from and with what intentions.

After the positive statement, it is recommended that the criticism be shared clearly and with a focus on the future; in order to be useful, it is imperative that the person receiving the criticism experiences it as input and not as an unproductive reproach. If it is instructions for the future, it adds value to the recipient's current performance or the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

Finally, it is recommended to end the conversation with a compliment that creates a sense of trust and an open, friendly connection, ready for future conversations. This technique is very effective because it allows people to internalize the criticism as an opportunity for improvement and not turn it into an attack on their self-esteem.

The other communicational tool that we recommend using is confrontation. Confronting is not about challenging, but rather a constructive discussion that adds value. Confrontation seeks the solution to a conflict, regardless of who offers up the solution, while challenging implies a fight between one side and the other, where the only priority is winning the argument.

What to do in the case of a confrontation:

- Convey that the relationship with the other person is valued.
- Go slowly and think about what one wants to say.
- Try to understand the other person's position.
- Listen attentively to what the other person is trying to convey (Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 268).

What not to do in the case of a confrontation:

- Explain the solution. Focus on what needs to be done, not on the problem. Often, we are too eager to tell others what they need to do, instead of letting them resolve and understand the situation.

- Interrupt communication. Even if the confrontation does not go according to plan, communication about the problem must remain constructive.

- Interrupt people to silence them. In general, sarcasm and attacks make others hostile and unfriendly. A confrontation is not a competition, which is why the goal is not winning, but rather solving a problem together.

- Rely on nonverbal cues to convey opinions. Communication means being frank and direct. This is not the time for signals and nonverbal subtlety.

- Talking about the problem with others before the confrontation with the person concerned. This can lead to the person becoming defensive and tense. (Weinberg and Gould, 1996, p. 268).

High performance teams train and increase performance all the time, and the leader spearheads this process of acquiring new tools. Learning strategies for conflict resolution, voicing criticism, and confrontation ensures a better group climate and more enjoyment among the team.

Thus, we have established specific guidelines about the second dimension of high performance leadership, that is, managing group climate. Through coexistence norms, concrete actions for task cohesion and social cohesion and communication development (the criticism sandwich and confrontation), the leader can create the best quality intragroup experience, strengthening individual and collective enjoyment.

2.2.4 The Career Plan and Personal Vision of Each Team Member

Finally, we will address the third and final leadership dimension of high performance: individual development. So far, the leader has reached maximum productivity level for the team through roles, objectives and reinforcements. They have also improved the team climate through team norms, cohesion actions and communication training. Until now, the team is perfectly oriented: we can review and manage individual components that make up the whole.

Individual development refers to strengthening the motivational state of each member of the team. When the leader properly manages this dimension, athletes continually demonstrate higher levels of positive energy and higher levels of commitment to daily tasks. The leader needs to know how to initially detect both variables.

The leader must be clear about the difference between attendance and commitment. Attendance only refers to quantitative participation in the team's daily routine, while for commitment, participation is also qualitative.

In many cases, a leader does not know how to tell the difference and only ends up understanding the difference for themselves in more stressful moments, like competitions or crucial situations. Attendance is a very important problem that threatens the peak performance of the team and of each member; the leader must know what conditions foster bad attendance, and how to prevent them.

When the team member is motivated, they have high levels of positive energy and there is therefore a greater probability of high levels of commitment to trainings or daily sessions. The role that the leader plays in this respect is key: they have the main responsibility for creating high levels of motivation in each and every group participant.

For the leader to work on the challenge of motivation, they need to understand that motivation refers to the direction and intensity of effort, and that the best way of motivating a team member is by presenting a career plan and a vision of the future and of personal growth. To guide each team member’s journey, they must clearly be shown what the destination will be, where the journey will take them and everything that this growth implies.

Personal vision is a measure that the leader should develop together with the athlete. It is not an activity that can or should be imposed, but rather a motivational action that should be developed gradually and be precisely defined, so that each team member feels that it is a deep

desire they want to reach. This vision includes performance and results. For example, planning to participate in the Olympics; it not only involves a plan that provides for successful strategies and objectives, but also the athlete's process of attitudinal and emotional development.

Vision is the athlete's commitment to achieve something in the future. It is also a great desire that involves a lot of energy on the part of the leader and requires a mastery of restraint, a systematized and incremental plan, and, crucially, appreciation of the destination towards which the team member is headed.

It is important to draw a distinction between two concepts that inexperienced leaders often tend to confuse: pep talks and vision.

Leaders can occasionally use a pep talk to enhance an athlete's energy level, knowing that its effect supports a short-term goal and its constant use puts its impact at risk. Usually, a pep talk is used in pursuit of reaching an immediate result.

Vision is connected to the athlete's internal management of beliefs to create a sustained, heightened level of internal energy which is associated with a medium or long-term goal. In the words of Manu Ginobili on his debut with the Spurs, I trusted that it was all a matter of time, training, matches, and not losing sight of the objective," (Frescó, 2005, p. 251).

Table 1: Motivational Tools: Vision and Pep Talk

Motivational Tool	Time Frame of the Goal	Motivation Coaching	Duration of Impact
Vision	Medium and long-term	Internal	Prolonged
Pep talk	Short-term	External	Brief

Source: Prepared by the author.

A high performance leader must know how to combine both expressions: pep talk is very useful in situations before competitions or in complex circumstances in which the team member is emotionally tied up and needs external help to untangle and boost energy levels. The leader must have communicational expertise to know how to raise a team member's emotional energy levels. New, young, and more emotional leaders use this more frequently.

But it is important for the leader not to forget that a pep talk is a possible resource. When the leader does not work on each athlete's vision and systematically repeats pep talks, the only thing that is

accomplished is a decay in its impact. In any case, this motivational tool has greater impact on young athletes.

Vision, on the other hand, is a more intense motivational tool that creates an increase in energy when the athlete starts to feel they have more resources, that they are more competent. So even if the effects of vision may take a long time, such effects are maintained and strengthened over time, since the goal set out at the beginning is ever closer to being met. This tool is used more widely by wise leaders with more experience in the role.

This is why we put both motivational tools at the high performance leader's disposal. It is not a question of having an exclusive vision (either one or the other), but an inclusive vision, (one and the other). High performance requires increased energy levels during a given episode, but also sustained levels of motivational energy.

To conclude the section on this third dimension, it is worth reflecting on a central idea that we explored at the beginning of Module 2. This is the concept of enjoyment. The leader must manage performance, but also enjoyment, for each team member, so that the probability of achieving desired results will thereby be achieved.

Table 2: **Dimensions of Leadership**

Productivity	Roles Objectives Reinforcement
Group Climate	Norms Task Cohesion Social Cohesion Criticism Sandwich Confrontation
Individual Development	Vision Pep talk Commitment

Source: Prepared by the author.

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