'Black Magic': The Building of Internationally Competitive Teams in New Zealand

By
Dr Dai W. Gilbertson

ABSTRACT: *At the heart of international competitiveness lies the human attributes and processes required for sustained winning. Studies of the human side of international competitiveness have largely relied on competence listing and skill indexing. These classification approaches do not address the dynamic human processes of building an international team capable of sustained winning. From its small population base, New Zealand has an unprecedented success rate in the sporting world. Success in international business however, has been less spectacular. This qualitative research project focuses on the identification of attributes and human processes for building winning international teams in sport and business. In this study 'Captains of Sport', individuals who have led teams which have won world titles or gold medallist the Olympic Games, worked with 'Captains of Industry', who are known for their international competitiveness, to identify the attributes and processes for building and launching winning teams. Data was gathered using both human and computer-aided responses. The data was processed by the participants and by the use of the NUD.IST qualitative analysis package. A surprising degree of agreement and convergence of ideas and human processes characterise the findings.*

KEY WORDS: TEAM-BUILDING, SPORT SUCCESS, BUSINESS SUCCESS

Introduction

An imperative for Australasian managers is the need to build international competitiveness. At the heart of 'competitiveness' is the notion of building winning teams (see CROCOMBE et al. 1991), yet the actual processes involved in building such teams remains elusive.

Studies of the human side of international competitiveness have largely relied on competence listing and skill indexing (see CAMPBELL-HUNT & HARPER 1993). Such 'classification' approaches do not address the dynamic human processes of building a team capable of sustained winning in the international arena. CROCOMBE et al. (1991) used sports examples from New Zealand to illustrate their model of competitive advantage by reference to 'factor' and 'advanced' constructs which explain New Zealand's dominance in sport. By holding New Zealand sport in focus, it was clearly Porter's intention to challenge business in New Zealand to reverse its productivity problems in business by embracing the best practices used in sport.

This project sought to bring together exemplars of building winning and internationally competitive teams in both sport and business to explore those factors critical for success in the international arena. This cross-over between sport and business can be viewed as a sub-set of a number of other areas of research which are represented diagrammatically below in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1
A Diagrammatic Representation of Related Research Areas
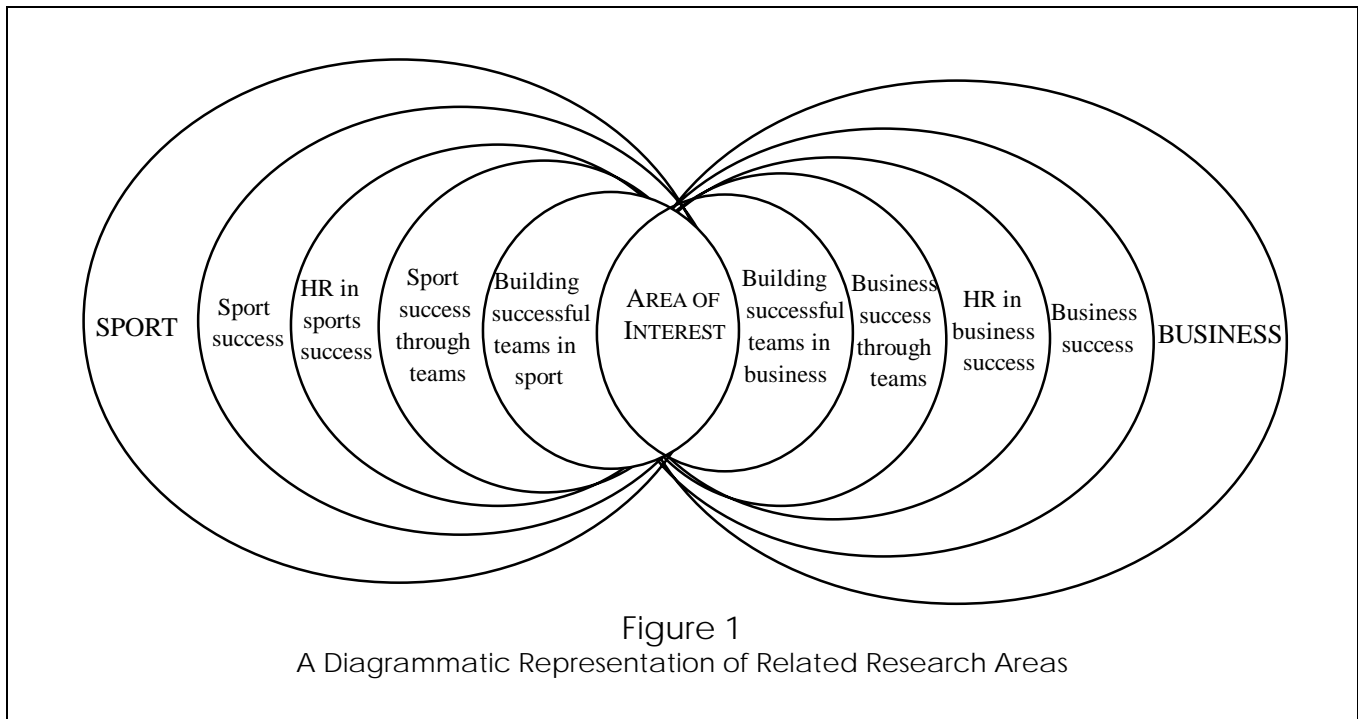
There is a wide variety of literature which relates to this study. In terms of the business perspective, there is an abundance of HRM literature, both popular and academic, on the significance of people in generating competitive advantage (for example, PFEFFER 1994), the importance of teams in organisations (GRAHAM 1992, KINLAW 1991, KATZENBACH & SMITH 1993), and ways of building successful business teams (KINLAW 1991, KOLLER 1989, QUICK 1992, SASHKIN 1994, SHONK 1992).

The sports-related literature tends to be anecdotal. Successful teams and team building have long since been the interest of sports psychologists (eg, SCHELLENBERGER 1990), as has the concept of coaching (eg, LLEWELLYN 1982).   Transferring the coaching model to the business environment has also been attempted (LOMBARDI 1992, YAGER 1993) and studies have been done into athletes turned business-people (KERBAUGH 1986). Other related topics have been the use of sporting success as an analogy in business (CROCOMBE *et al.* 1991), and a look at business success from a sports psychology perspective (WINTER & HAMILTON 1992). The area of sports team and business team success and comparison - the area looked at in this study - remains relatively untouched in the literature.

Research Objectives

This qualitative research project focuses on the identification of attributes and human processes for building winning international teams in sport and business. In this study 'Captains of Sport` (individuals who have led teams which have won world titles or Olympic gold medals) worked with 'Captains of Industry` (who are known for their international competitiveness) to:

a) Identify the attributes and processes for building and launching winning teams.
b) Determine the limitations of sporting metaphors in business.
c) Explore issues of transferability of sports concepts to business.

The data is initially presented in skeletal form and is integrated into a dynamic model later in the paper.

Methods

The methods used to gather and analyse the qualitative data are unusual, in that software which was developed for use in a group decisions process (GROUP SYSTEMS 5: 1993) was used to gather, order and synthesise data provided in what could be termed an electronically-assisted focus-group interview. The work of DENNIS *et al.* (1991) for example, guided us in the use of electronic meetings which could be modified for research purposes.

The data was elicited by iteration through the following steps:

1. Individuals typing their data into a PC in a private session.
2. Information sharing via a 'public', on-screen session
3. Entry of further data by individuals in both private and public sessions.

Clustering of the data around underlying 'factors' was achieved by the following process:

1. Data reduction by human interaction ('mind-mapped' out on a whiteboard).
2. Photographing the mind-map.
3. Conclusion.

Data was gathered using verbal, graphic and computer-aided responses in an attempt to triangulate the responses and expose underlying factors. The data was processed by the participants and later by the use of the NUD.IST qualitative analysis package.

The principles which under-pinned the methods used, are those discussed by TURNER (1981) in the quest for grounded theory. The significant departure from other ways of organising the cognitive processes as found in the literature, is the use of computer-aided data generation and synthesis. The authors of this report were strongly attracted to the experimental use of both the group decisions software and NUD.IST as a means of both achieving understanding through analysis, and the construction of 'reality' by the respondents with an minimum of experimenter bias. However, artefacts remain of concern, especially the categorisation of data which is still required of the researcher when using NUD.IST. While the computer-based software was potent in its ability to capture data, and to reduce data to rank order, it became clear that there is an opposite requirement to build dynamic models or theories which call for analysis of variable interactions.

Thus, we observed two processes - dissembling the phenomena, and re-assembling to build a grounded theory. We found the second process challenging and the stages 7 through 9 of the schematic list for the stages of grounded theory (GLASER & STRAUSS 1968) difficult due to the short duration of data gathering and the need to observe actual interaction among the key factors.

We found that, notwithstanding the above artefacts and cautions, the use of group decision software linked to group data reduction and mind-mapping, were powerful techniques for building understanding.

Findings

The first dimension explored was the usefulness of sporting experiences in building success in business. There was one hundred percent agreement to the statement that:

> "New Zealand sport is a useful model for New Zealand business to achieve success in international competition"

The following results incorporate the ideas, opinions, and suggestions of the sample group concerning the building of competitive advantage. The results have been divided into three main sections.

a) The identification of critical success factors (CSFs) in building a team or individual that will win in international competition.
b) The identification of factors that will assist in fostering winners.
c) The transferability from the sport to the business domain - lessons and limitations.

The following analysis has at its core the need to dissect the data into factors. Attempts at the construction of the first stage of a dynamic model is discussed in a later section.

Critical Success Factors

One hundred and thirty-two comments were received to the question "What are the critical success factors for winning?". The participants grouped these into thirteen factors deemed to be critical for success. Further discussion eliminated overlap so that seven factors were agreed by the whole group. *Figure 2* is a conceptual map of the data and outlines the main inter-relationships between the critical success areas as identified by the participants.

A definition and example(s) of the themes associated with each factor are given below:

1. GOALS

The first critical success factor identified was the need for a vision, dream or end-point which became a challenging goal. Ten percent of all comments made related to the need for such a goal. The following comments are illustrative:
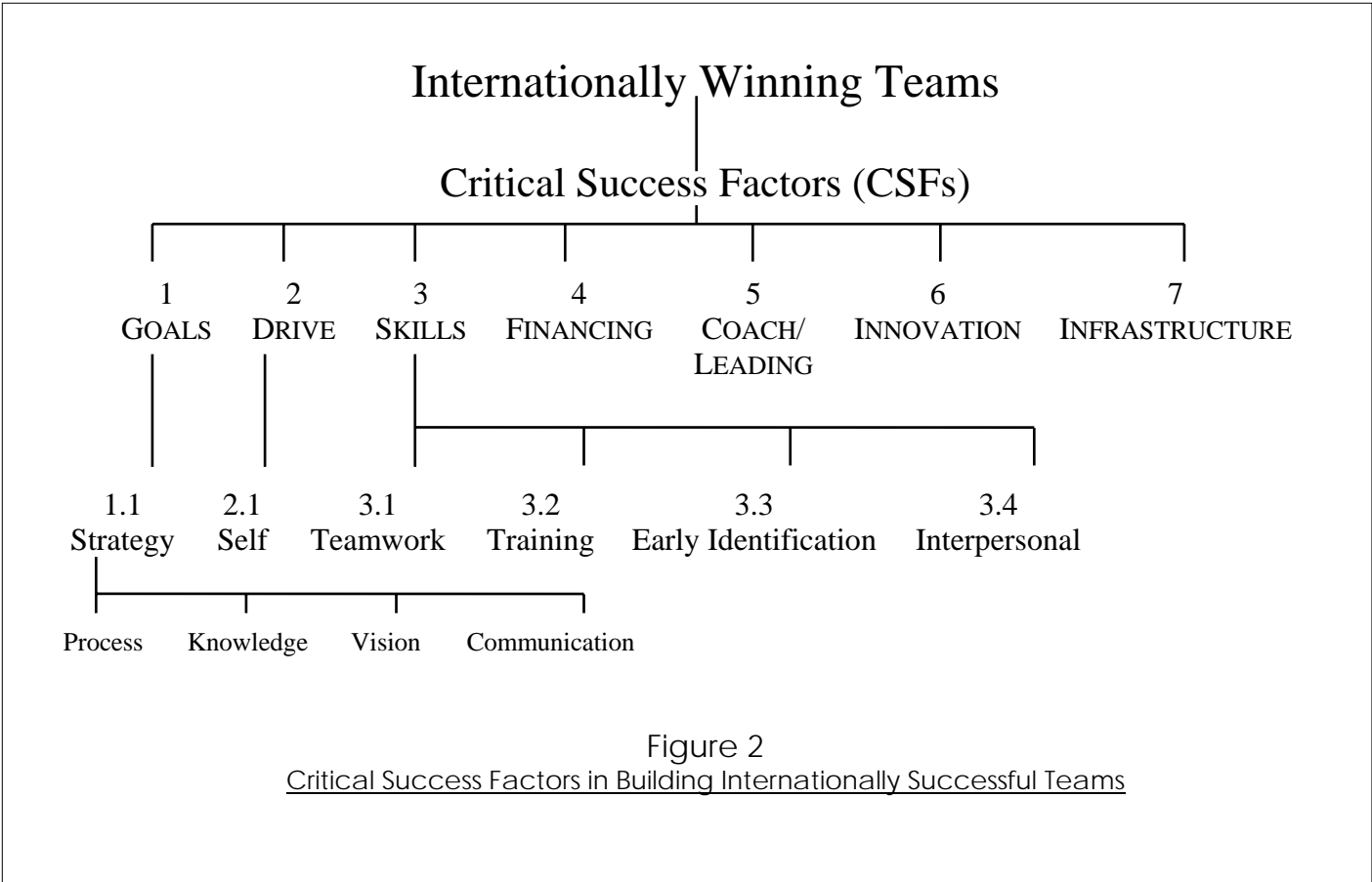
> *Have a dream - vision.*
> *Shared clear vision.*
> *Strategy to get there that's realistic.*
> *Regular reappraisal of the goals and the means to achieving them.*

1.1. Strategy

Associated with goals was the need for a long term plan for success. Understanding oneself, the environment and being prepared to change were seen to be vital. Twenty-seven percent of all comments made related to the need for a strategy. The following comments are illustrative:

Knowledge of the game.
Know the market: Know the competition.
Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of own team and the opposition.
Be prepared to change.
Recognise in the end people make the difference.

Directly associated with strategy is the need to identify and understand the 'process', 'vision', 'knowledge', and 'communication' aspects associated with creating specific goals.

Internationally Winning Teams

Critical Success Factors (CSFs)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
GOALS	DRIVE	SKILLS	FINANCING	COACH/ LEADING	INNOVATION	INFRASTRUCTURE

1.1	2.1	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
Strategy	Self	Teamwork	Training	Early Identification	Interpersonal

Process   Knowledge   Vision   Communication

Figure 2
Critical Success Factors in Building Internationally Successful Teams

2. DRIVE

The second critical success factor identified related to the urge or drive an individual has to work, or the amount they are motivated or driven to succeed. Four percent of all comments made related to the need for a drive to succeed. The following comments are illustrative:

Motivation!
Attitude!
Desire to achieve - succeed.

2.1 Self

Associated with drive was the need to identify, understand and have a belief in one's self. Fourteen percent of all comments made related to the need to identify aspects of self. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Belief in self.*
> *Faith in self and advisers.*
> *Being realistic - Being positive.*
> *Belief what you are doing is important.*

3. SKILLS

The third critical success factor identified was the need to have a special proficiency, ability or training which can become a special or recognisable skill. Eleven percent of all comments made related to the recognition of special skills. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Match skills with people.*
> *Right person for the job - Right people form the right concept.*
> *Everyone comes with skills, see what skills they have - fine tune them, for their success, when they are successful they are coaching themselves/hungry for knowledge.*

3.1 Teamwork

A key area associated with skills was recognising other's abilities, working efficiently, and working co-operatively to create the best environment for effective teamwork to occur. Fifteen percent of all comments made related to being able to work effectively in a team. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Appreciating diversity - analyse strengths and weaknesses.*
> *Can't succeed without full co-operation and participation.*
> *Common set of values - Complementing each other.*

3.2 Early Identification

Directly associated with teamwork was the need for early identification of individuals with outstanding skills and abilities. Two percent of all comments made related to the need to identify individuals early on. The following comment is illustrative:

> *A passion to be the best - and a dedication to the effort required to excel.*

3.3 Training

The other key area associated with skills was the need to encourage individuals to practice, focus, and get appropriate instructions to build on their skills and abilities. In other words, recognising the importance of on-going development and training. Ten percent of all comments made related to the need and value of training. The following comments are illustrative:

> *A passion to be the best and a dedication to the effort required to excel.*
> *A combination of early skill development and later continuous skill 'honing'.*
> *Program to develop own strengths and eliminate or hide weaknesses and to exploit opposition weaknesses and bypass their strengths.*
> *Focus, focus, focus!*
> *Being prepared to make serious errors, learning from them.*

3.4 Interpersonal

Directly associated with training was recognition of the important relationship(s) we have with others. One percent of all comments were identified relating to their interpersonal associations. The following comment is illustrative:

> *Respect for others around you.*

4. FINANCES

The fourth critical success factor identified was the need to have appropriate financial or funding conditions to create an environment for success. Two percent of all comments made related to the importance of having adequate finances. The following comment is illustrative:

> *Finance to develop these ideas and back them.*

5. COACHING/LEADERSHIP

The fifth critical success factor identified applied to the role and value of learning from an experienced individual, guide, coach or leader. Seventeen percent of all comments made related to the role and benefit of having a good coach or leader. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Leadership at the top, encourages and sustains motivation.*
> *Sees potential.*
> *Faith in self and advisers.*
> *The coach never discovers the player, they only give the confidence to discover themselves.*
> *We are all only bound by the limits of our own imagination.*

6. INNOVATION

The sixth critical success factor identified was the need to continually try new methods or ways of doing things and improving. Success and innovation were said to go hand-in-hand. Three percent of all comments made related to the need for innovation. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Be prepared to change.*
> *Be prepared to make errors, learning from them.*
> *Make the most of every single opportunity, these should be evaluated all the time and no new idea should be cast aside until the team has had a chance to explore it.*

7. INFRASTRUCTURE

The seventh and final critical success factor identified the need to have a good system or structure within a stimulating and resourceful environment to create the appropriate infrastructure. Four percent of all comments made related to the need for a good infrastructure. The following comments are illustrative:

> *Need good support structures/coaches/mentors/business skills.*
> *Recognise that in the end it is people that will make a difference, and that the structures are there to make it happen.*

The Essence of Winning in International Competition

To reinforce the critical success factors, participants were asked to state what they considered the "essence of winning in international competition to be". Nine participants responded. Their ideas are given below.

Exceptional performances require an individual or team to utilise all their skills, in order to maximise their performance, which will require exceptional sacrifices but offer great challenges and rewards.
Ms Phillipa Baker - Olympic Gold Medallist

The right choice of people will help make the right decisions that will go a long way towards winning.
Mr Peter Blake - Yaughting World Champion

Know your product, the market, the company personnel and culture, accept no boundaries and be prepared to "win" and occasionally "lose" (taking responsibility).
Mr Lynton Bridger - CEO

Shared vision, and regular recommitment to the goals.
Gold medals are won in the boardroom five years before the race.
Mr Peter Dale - CEO

Maximise your skills, talents, and abilities and fulfil your dream by sacrificing everything to achieve it.
Sir Richard Hadlee - New Zealand Cricketer

The result must not give the opportunity to later say "if only".
Sir Murray Halberg - Olympic Gold Medallist

Must have the desire to succeed above all else.
Mr Allan Harwood - CEO
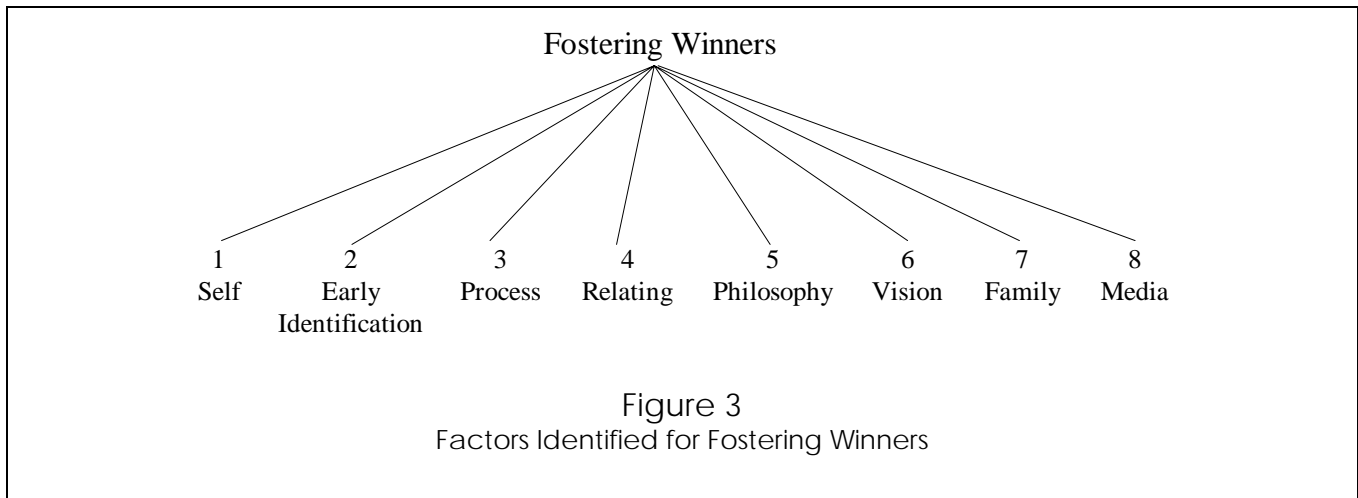
Know thyself.
Mr Neville Jordan - CEO

Do your best!
Know your competition.
Mr Arthur Lydiard - Olympic Coach

Fostering Winners

One hundred and twenty-six answers were received to the question "How can we in New Zealand create an environment which fosters the critical success factors identified earlier?". The participants grouped the responses into the eight factors. These are shown in *Figure 3.*

Fostering Winners

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1          2          3          4          5          6        7        8
Self     Early     Process   Relating  Philosophy  Vision   Family   Media
       Identification
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Figure 3
Factors Identified for Fostering Winners

A definition and illustrations of the type of comments associated with each factor follows.

1.   SELF
The first factor identified to foster winners related to an individuals perception of themselves, their individuality, and their environment. Six percent of all comments related to the recognition of self. The following comments are illustrative of this:

> *Fostering a good self image.*
> *Be prepared to open up your ideas and plans for suggestions.*
> *Treat others as you would like them to treat you.*

2.   EARLY IDENTIFICATION
The second factor identified to foster winners was the need to create an environment which recognises an individual, or an individual's attributes and skills, early-on or during the planning stage. Early identification of individuals can help them and the team to make the most of their abilities and skills. Three percent of all comments related to early identification of individuals. The following comments are illustrative of this:

> *Back potential winners early on.*
> *Early identification of leadership skills.*
> *Identify correct people for jobs.*
> *Education in an ongoing way.*
> *Establish support programs.*

3.   PROCESS
The third factor necessary to foster winners was the creation of an environment where the 'success process' is appreciated, rewarded, challenged, and encouraged. Individuals need to realise these are necessary and natural processes to learn and grow. Twenty-four percent of all comments related to the process of learning. The following comments illustrate this:

> *Reward successes.*
> *Be prepared to accept failure.*
> *Create an environment where there is an opportunity to play, participate and enjoy the game.*
> *Use success models as references.*

Acceptance for different learning styles.
Follow through with a system to accommodate individuality, but to be really productive foster an environment of team or group learning.
Have the game plan.
Be prepared for change.

4.   RELATING

The fourth factor identified in fostering winners was the creation of an environment where individuals value themselves and others; winners must make a positive and encouraging efforts to connect, associate with, and relate to others. Two percent of all comments related to the process of relating to others. The following comments illustrate this:

Acceptance of difference in people.
Recognition of other team members which encompasses encouragement, support, understanding, compassion, etc.

5.   PHILOSOPHY

The fifth factor identified for fostering winners was the creation of an environment where an individual's outlook or system of beliefs and values aligns with a philosophy for success. Three percent of all comments related to the importance of having a success oriented philosophy. The following comments illustrate this:

Success is OK!
Be open to the need for change, recognise opportunities, mistakes and above all learn from them.

6.   VISION

The sixth factor identified for fostering winners was the creation of an environment were it is possible to imagine and become what can be seen in the mind's eye. To encourage others to have a positive outlook and vision is crucial to creating reality. Three percent of all comments related to the importance of having a realistic, attainable, and challenging vision. The following comments illustrate this:

Encourage people to think in terms of goals.
Use and listen to role models who have achieved; share the vision.
Give New Zealanders a realistic vision for the future.

7.   FAMILY

The seventh factor identified to foster winners was to create an environment which recognises the importance of the family. Family rules, expectations, support, beliefs, values, encouragement, and members were seen to be crucial in fostering a successful individual and environment. One percent of all comments was identified to related to the role the family and the family environment plays:

Family standards and values re right and wrong.

8.   MEDIA

The eighth and final factor identified for fostering winners was related to the media. It was felt that the media should promote a more positive and favourable national environment for success. One percent of all comments related to the crucial role the media plays:

Change the national environment - ie. the media have a huge impact on individuals' thinking.

They tend to concentrate on failures rather than successes; negatives rather than positives.
This attitude can be and is very harmful.

The Captain's Role In Building A Winning Team

The role of the captain was considered by the group to be crucial in fostering winners. Participants were asked to state what they considered the captain's role to be in building a winning team. Fourteen participants responded. Their statements follow.

The captain's role is to accept responsibility to make decisions with a clear ideal of how to meet the team's vision.
Ms Phillipa Baker - Olympic Gold Medallist

The captain's role is to provide the encouragement and motivation necessary to the team.
Don't ask anyone to do anything you wouldn't be prepared to do yourself.
Treat member of your team as you would expect them to treat you.
Mr Peter Blake - Yachting Champion

The Captain attracts and channels collaborative energy from the team to empower others and to establish, work through, and evaluate agreed objectives.
Mr Lynton Bridger - CEO

Respect for team members.
Be the motivator.
Mould team spirit.
Mr Arthur Lydiard - Olympic Coach

Stretch the borders of the big picture, then help the team members to work within it.
Mr Peter Dale - CEO

To gain respect, the captain needs to set the standard by leading by example and having a sound knowledge of the game so that a common team objective is achieved.
Sir Richard Hadlee - New Zealand Cricketer

Remain a vibrant innovative human being.
Sir Murray Halberg - Olympic Gold Medallist

The Captain's prime competency is people relationship skills.
Mr Allan Harwood - CEO

Keep your hands on the helm and don't fiddle with the sails.
Mr Neville Jordan - CEO

The role of the captain is to incite performance from the team by serving as the strategist responsible for identifying the players' roles and objectives. This is accomplished through establishing an atmosphere of respect for each other in a participative, not interfering manner.
Mr Tom McGuigan - CEO

The captain is the one who is able to build consensus on a strategy and vision, provide the tools (continuous skill-building/training) to people, empower people to make decisions that affect their ability to accomplish their goals (delegate) and motivates people through recognition and reward.
Mr Jim Miller - CEO

The captain must be accessible to those around him, encapsulating and administering the team's vision while maintaining the broader values and standards of the greater organisation.
Mr Graham Mourie - Rugby Champion

You are successful when all the team are 'Captains'.
Communication, vision, respect, knowledge - are the key elements.
Ms Lois Muir - Coach Silver Ferns

The captain should both lead and listen.
Mr Blythe Tait - Olympic Gold Medallist - Equestrian

Lessons And Limitations

The participants were asked to identify what they considered the most important lessons and limitations of using New Zealand sport as a model for New Zealand business. Participants were asked to comment on the following questions:

1. "What lessons can New Zealand business learn from New Zealand sport?"
2. "What are the limitations of using New Zealand sports as a model for New Zealand business?"

Lessons

Sixty-nine 'lessons' New Zealand sport can give to New Zealand business were identified. However, due to time limitations participants were not asked to group their responses. Examples of what were considered to be the most applicable lessons are given below.

*   There are no limits to achievement

> *Aim high - there are no limits - records are always broken.*
> *There are no limits to achievement in sport, whereas there are many inhibiting factors in business.*
> *The competition in sport is so clear cut.*

*   Hard work always 'pays'

> *Sacrifices are necessary to achieve results.*
> *You must work hard for results.*
> *Financial rewards cannot be your only motivation but will hopefully become the outcome.*

*   People make the difference

> *The feeling in a team originates at the top.*
> *Successful teams are based on good administration and leadership. Successful sports generally have a long-term plan to select and develop the key performers to a higher level of achievement.*
> *There is a danger of thinking that sport in New Zealand is well organised. In fact by and large it is not, rather it is a happy combination of excellent coaches and great athletes combining to produce great results.*
> *In sports - teams place a high regard on leaders, this is not so clear in business.*

*   Every problem has a solution

All problems have solutions.
Be flexible in your approach to the problem, there are more solutions than problems.
A lesson from Rugby - Don't over-complicate things and get lawyers involved.

* A is for attitude

    Persevere through the good, bad, and indifferent times with a bright and optimistic attitude.

* There's a whole new world (market) out there

    New Zealand sports people have been prepared to take on the world outside of New Zealand.

* Teams and goals - get them clear

    Groups with clear purposes allow personalities to play second fiddle.
    The best teams are small closely integrated self controlling units where the impetus to perform is strongly shared.
    The organisation they belong to must identify the environment in which they can perform and let them get on with it.

Limitations

Forty-four comments were received about the limitations of using New Zealand sport as a model for New Zealand business. Participants were not asked to group their responses. Examples of what were considered to be the most important differences or limitations are given below.

* Difference in size

    Sport focuses on individual effort more than the team environment.
    Sports teams are smaller and easier to control.

* Difference in motivation

    Difference in motivation of individuals in a sporting team and a business team.

* Difference in focus

    Much of sport is single focus, a single event, a fairly narrow perspective, whereas business has to live much more realistically in the wider social context.
    These might be a tendency to focus on individual effort rather than how you mould a winning team in sport.

* Difference in rules and milestones

    Sports has easily identified winning posts. Recognise the difference in goals and complexity.
    Winning on the sports field has fewer barriers than the business world. Simpler rules, and a Corinthian approach that is not always evident in the 'real' world
    It is not as easy to measure business event-by-event as it is in a sports competition. Defining objectives in bite-size bits compared to weekly objectives of sporting teams.

* Difference in time periods

    Business longer term - sports shorter term.

* Different perception/value of finances

Much sport is not commercially oriented - survival may not depend upon winning. Whereas winning (profit) in business is a basic necessity.

*   Difference in competition

The world of sport always has clear competition. New competitors arrive fairly slowly and their progress can be clearly monitored. Competition in business can creep up very quickly and take the traditional leaders by surprise.

*   Difference in overall orientation

Not everybody knows or cares about sport.
If you're not a star or an 'A' team player your future is limited.
Not a good old boys network - could be a perception.

However, as was earlier reported, all respondents felt that in general, sports ideas about fostering and building winning teams were directly transferable to business

The group methodology with computer interface was very useful in dissecting the data but did not provide an insight to the dynamic nature of building winning teams. A necessary condition for the development of a grounded theory was an attempt to factor a mind-map or conception of how the factors related. The facilitators led a process which resulted in an agreed mind-map. The results of the process were photographed and are shown in *Figure 4*.
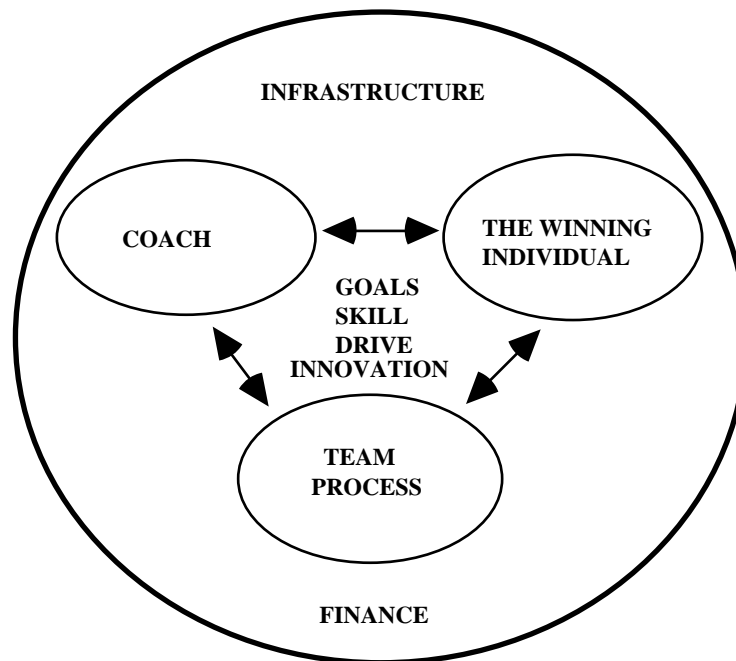

Figure 4
Mind Map - Inter-relationship of Critical Success Factors

The above is a first attempt at a dynamic model based solely on the elicited data. From this seminal map one can derive propositions about relationships. There appear to be three core factors in the dynamic model: the coach, the individual, and the team, whose interaction about goals, skills, drive, and innovation are seen as determinants of success. Further, these interactions are surrounded by an infrastructure and finance which can sometimes limit success. The exact nature of these interactions remains unclear. Naturally, one needs to extend this research project by the use of participant observation if one is to develop specific propositions about the nature of the interactions between the coach, potentially winning individual, and the team process. If this stage were completed one could then posit a grounded theory about the transformation of individual potential into winning achievements in international competition.

Conclusions

With the limitations and artefacts stated earlier one can advance the following tentative conclusions on the basis of this initial explanation:

- Seven specific critical success factors were identified.

- Eight factors which assist in fostering winners were identified.

- All factors were seen by the participants to be inter-related.

- Three core and two surrounding factors were seen to directly impact potential winners.

- The use of the Group Decision Centre software proved to be an excellent research tool.

- Agreement was reached by participants that critical success factors in sport were directly transferable to business

Clearly, this has been the first explanatory step in the process of creating a grounded theory of winning in international competition. Further research into the nature of the interaction between the factors can now proceed.

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