PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Excellence with Integrity: Culture Assessment & Development

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Background

The Excellence with Integrity Institute (formerly the Institute for Excellence & Ethics—IEE) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to achieving excellence with integrity. The Excellence With Integrity Institute (the Institute) designs and implements assessment strategies, delivers targeted professional development, and develops instructional resources to guide organizations through the intricacies and hurdles of continuous self-reflection and improvement. The Institute is primarily a research and design organization helping organizations develop the culture and character needed for mission excellence. The Institute has served many organizations from schools and youth leadership, sports and business, manufacturing and service, military, government, and healthcare.

ABSTRACT

This article presents the story of the team culture grounded theory and assessment approach of the Excellence with Integrity Institute and its collaborative partners. The article begins with an overview of character, culture, and leadership assessment and development theory, which has evolved over nearly 25 years of work in diverse sectors including education, nonprofit, workplace, and athletics. The theory development forms the foundation to the authors' particular assessment philosophy and practice. This is followed by the rationale underlying the key design solutions represented in the Excellence with Integrity Culture Assessment Approach. The article concludes with specific examples of the use of the Excellence with Integrity Culture Assessment in Division I, II, and III intercollegiate teams and whole athletic departments.

In order to understand the strategic intent and applications of the Excellence with Integrity Culture Assessment (which will be laid out in the second part of this article), this article begins by laying out foundational theory that has emerged from bootstrapping between the theory, practice, assessment, and development. In this issue devoted to expanding the dialogue around the challenges of assessment of leadership and character development, the Institute believes that contained within the evolution of our grounded theory and practice are some pieces of the shared challenges of all who attempt assessment in this area. Our evolving grounded theory is most certainly co-mingled with the development of our particular assessment tools.

At the outset of our work on character education, leadership, and organizational development some 25 years ago, the initial focus was on assessing character. The Institute began with a narrow focus on character informed by theoretical and practical needs of the modern character education movement of the 1990s and 2000s, bringing cognitive moral psychology roots deeply influenced by human ecology, sociology, and social learning theory. Specifically, the goal was to be able to tell if an individual was changing and growing in cognition, affect, and behavior, usually around a specific set of values and virtues. Regardless of the sector, the leaders served wanted to know if their interventions were improving character traits in individuals. They also wanted to know if the development of these character traits was having a mediating impact on other important outcomes, such as grades, test scores, wins and losses, profits and efficiency, safety and overall well-being, and recruitment and retention.

Thus, at the outset the Institute focused primarily on the measurement of specific values and virtues, but always maintained a focus on culture as the mechanism through which character was developed. Over the years, the Institute has developed a variety of instruments driven by our interests and expertise, but also very much by the pragmatic needs of those in the field. Not all of these tools have received the same amount of developmental attention or rigor; often, our organization has moved on to a next iteration of a new instrument, informed by new insights, improved design solutions, or changing customer focus.

Leading for Optimal Performance

The evolution of our grounded theory (Davidson, Khmelkov, & Baker, 2011; Lickona & Davidson, 2005), which is informed by our diverse applied research experiences and supported by research studies on talent development and organizational success, can be summarized as follows: Team or organizational excellence is achieved by specific personal habits and mindset of team members that are formed from a team/

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organizational culture, and that culture is shaped and built by a leader (see Figure 1).

The Institute defines culture as "the intentional norms, practices, and collective habits of a group or team." Culture shapes, molds, or builds the personal habits, skills, and competencies of team members (i.e., character). Therefore, it can be asserted that character is the personal habits (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral habits; the head, heart, and hand) and that character is shaped by culture. This model is seen most easily when one looks at religious and military formation. It is evident that individuals entering these groups have certain personalities, abilities, and character traits. But after entry, these are shaped and formed by the culture and collective habits. However, every team and organization is faced with the same

challenge: How can a group of individuals develop around a shared set of mission values and tactical goals? The answer is that leaders shape the culture (collective habits), which in turn shapes character (individual habits).

Whereas leadership, culture, and character can be viewed as an important organizational goal or focus, they are also the means to achieving mission excellence and "optimal performance." The Institute defines optimal performance as "the highest level of excellence achieved with integrity." Leadership expert Peter Koestenbaum (1991) asserted that "leadership is the art of combining results and heart" (p. 22). The heart of leadership is motivating, empowering, and persuading others to buy into not only the performance goals and expectations, but also into individual growth and the

Figure 1. Leading through culture and character process diagram.
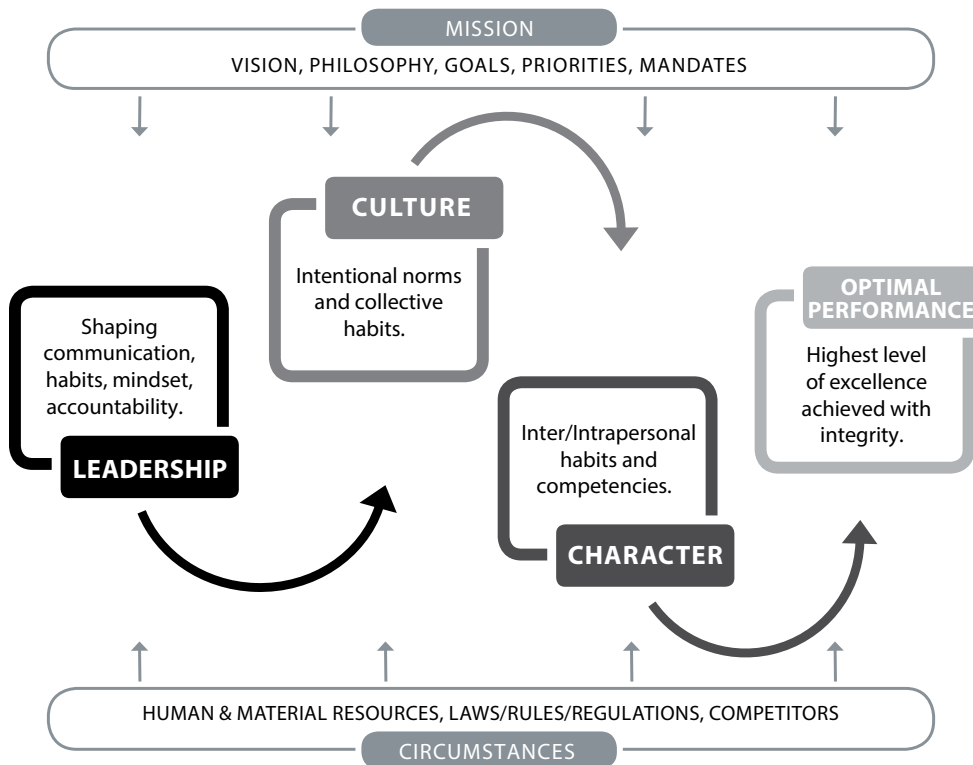
collective good. In other words, it is not just about wining, but doing so in a fair, ethical, and harmonious way. Moreover, it is not just about achieving excellence, but achieving excellence with integrity.

The Leading Through Character and Culture (LTCC) model includes two additional macro forces that impact the organizational development process—mission and circumstances. The first important macro force is the mission of the organization and its related goals, priorities, mandates, and philosophy. It is from the mission that teams and organizations derive their bedrock virtues or animating values be they faith, hope, and love or honor, duty, and country. Character can be operationally defined as values/virtues in action. Putting them into action requires a mix of knowledge, affect, and skill. One's character can be considered the consistency (or inconsistency) with which one puts their espoused values/virtues into action. The questions our organization often faces include "which values?" or "whose values?" When working with teams and organizations, the answer can be found in the organizational mission and vision. To be certain, there are powerful sports teams whose culture is built around the animating values of a coach leader reminiscent of John Wooden's "pyramid of success" (Biro, 1997) or the All Blacks rugby culture (Kerr, 2013). In business, case studies such as Patagonia highlight instances where a leader such as Yvon Chouinard (2006) created an organizational culture animated by his or her personal values. At the origins of those cultures, the animating values were those of the leader. Over time, however, the powerful leader's values become the organizational identity and other coaches and leaders are invited in to extend, refresh, and reanimate those founding values.

However, in many settings, the teams are part of a larger mission—of the university, corporation, or larger universal system. In these settings—be they military, monastery, athletic, or business—intentional cultures are guided by bedrock values derived from the organizational mission. The organizational mission is an essential influence on the process since in an intentional culture every other action and inter-action is ultimately designed to put those foundational values into action.

The Institute has often used Soldiers First by Joe Drape (2012) as both a case study and a metaphor to explain our approach. Drape has shown how football at West Point exists to serve the organization mission of creating soldiers. This is an illustrative example of coaches leading a team guided by a larger mission than football. However, it is also a metaphor that accurately captures what many other team leaders within many other team settings are challenged to lead. For example, in working with Catholic universities, "soldiers first" conveys that transmission of Catholic mission and values represent the raison d'être for university athletics (Davidson & Davis, 2018). Thus, a distinctly Jesuit athletics experience is one where coaches are expected to amplify and deepen the Jesuit mission firstly. Or, consider the De La Salle High School football case, whose 151-game win streak was chronicled by leadership experts (Kanter, 2004) and popularized in documentaries (Heiser, 2005) and pop culture movies (Carter, 2014). De La Salle Head Coach Bob Ladouceur has consistently maintained that football simply represented his opportunity as a leader to create a culture that concretized and amplified the school's Catholic mission expressed as "enter to learn, leave to serve."

In collaboration with Stanford University Athletics, the work of culture assessment and development with the department's 36 teams is animated by the core values and strategic intent of the department to create what they refer to as, Champions in Life." "Soldiers First at Stanford translates to "Champions in Life"—as the primary goal or priority. This is mirrored in many of the workplace settings our organization serves, and was also found in James Collins' (2001) *Good to Great* organizations who were guided by mission-touchstones, which made bedrock values a good

for daily behavior (Collins, 2001). In other words, in education, business, nonprofit, and government, leaders and teams most often are using their leadership talents to operationalize the mission values of the organization. This was a significant but perhaps subtle lesson from *Good to Great*: It was not the rock star personality, nor was it the cult of personality that created sustainable excellence; instead, it was the culture shaped by the leaders animating the vision and values of the organization, which was most resilient and transformational over time (Collins, 2001).

The second significant macro force is the specific circumstances facing the organization, including the human and material resources, the laws, rules, and regulations, and the competitors and competition. Optimal performance (i.e., the highest level of excellence achieved with integrity) is not a constant or permanent standard. The highest level of excellence achieved with integrity depends a great deal on a variety of fluid factors and circumstances within the organization and within the wider culture in which the organization is nested. Intercollegiate athletics is a relevant example where the changing circumstances have deeply impacted what the highest level of excellence achieved with integrity means for all stakeholders. Both macro forces substantively impact teams, team leaders, and the overall culture—and are often beyond the control of team leaders.

Our model is not revolutionary in terms of human and organizational development. It is evolutionary in its representation of overall change theory, which has dynamically informed and been informed by our assessment and strategies. The Leading for Optimal Performance—highest effectiveness achieved with integrity—model is rooted in the truth of the adage that "culture eats strategy for lunch." More specifically, it can be argued that unintentional culture—the de facto, unofficial, yet widely accepted collective habits of a group or team—eats strategy for lunch. Few leaders have been able to achieve optimal performance without

intentionally shaping the culture and character of the team or organization they lead. Our work helps build the kind of leadership that is needed for the organizational culture to be intentional in the pursuit of excellence with integrity.

Culture and Character Theory Overview– Optimal Performance Behaviors

The Leading for Optimal Performance model summarizes the mechanisms and the structural inputs needed to achieve excellence with integrity in pursuit of the team/organizational goals. The model focuses on team/organizational leadership as the necessary input for team development, not on leadership as an outcome of personal development. Although development of future leaders can be the goal (outcomes) for teams, such as in intercollegiate athletics or military academies, it is not the focus of the assessment work described here. The Institute assesses the inputs into team development and performance, informed by the evolution of our grounded theory.

Culture—the collective habits of a team, group or organization—is essential for optimal performance because the unintentional culture can kill the strategy of any and every organization no matter its size or resources. In addition, our applied work convinces us that intentional culture is how great organizations outperform their resources and achieve sustainable excellence. This notion is not necessarily novel or entirely revolutionary; however, many leaders continue to dismiss it hoping that improvements in talent development and recruitment and overall enhancements in technology alone would move their organizations beyond the fickle fate of culture.

While the Institute is focused on culture and character as the specific focus of our assessment and development work, over time our view has widened to understand the mediating role of culture and character on optimal performance goals. Every affiliated team, group, or organization has been interested in performance

excellence. They seek help defining, measuring, and exploring the factors that promote or prevent it. While the circumstances and strategy surrounding the pursuit of excellence continue to change and evolve, the quest for excellence is timeless. *The ancient Greeks used the term arête* to describe excellence of any kind—the excellence of a work of art, a machine, or a person. Arête also referred to the excellence found in the act of living up to one's full potential (Liddell & Scott, 1940). Scholars argue that the person of arête is a person of the highest effectiveness, someone who combines their talents and abilities with strengths of character like courage, perseverance, resilience, wit and ingenuity to achieve real results (Hooker, 2011). In other words, excellence means the highest effectiveness in achieving real results by a person, team, or organization. Highest effectiveness is not defined by one standard or one pathway. However, highest effectiveness, no matter the goal or circumstances, is that which is achieved with integrity.

Integrity can be defined as "the quality or state of being complete or undivided and having strong moral principles" ("integrity," 2019). Integrity means not lying, cheating, stealing, or engaging in unethical, illegal, or unhealthy behaviors when pursuing a goal. This definition of integrity speaks of the negative breaches of integrity that should be avoided. Thus, it can be posited that the highest effectiveness is that which also does not violate the law, the rules of participation, or moral principles of justice and fairness. But integrity is also defined as "being whole and undivided." This definition speaks to the desirable aspects of integrity to be pursued, things like growth, improvement, balance, and joy. Thus, integrity is not limited to not breaking the rules or the law. Integrity requires commitment to pursuing actions that are beneficial to oneself and others beyond the demands of a current objective or goal. Therefore, excellence with integrity is honest, ethical, and fair, helping to achieve intrapersonal and interpersonal balance and harmony.

Some might argue that it is in fact the relentless pursuit of excellence itself that leads to feelings of burnout, fatigue, and is characterized as seeming to "lack integrity." In other words, the pursuit of excellence, critics would assert, is at odds with or in conflict with the pursuit of integrity. However, this goes against the sentiments of Abraham Maslow (as cited in Neehall-Davidson, 2004, p. 95) that "[i]f you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life." The answer to achieving excellence with peace, joy, harmony, and happiness is not simply to be content with good enough, but to pursue excellence in a particular way. Whether it is rooted in fear, performance anxiety, personality, or personal preference, for many people and organizations good enough is simply good enough, and the quest for excellence and realization of full potential simply does not resonate or motivate everyone. However, the organizations typically served seek the Institute out because they already have achieved some level of success. They are good, but desire to be great. They also often seek out assistance even though they may already be considered great by others. To some degree, those served believe that they have yet to realize their full potential for excellence with integrity.

The Institute understands and acknowledges the importance of recruiting talented, strong individuals of character for achieving optimal performance. However, this alone is not a sufficient solution for achieving excellence with integrity in organizations with problematic culture, and neither is simply securing "ample resources," another means by which people believe they can short circuit the process to achieving optimal performance. Highly resourced teams are not immune to excellence or integrity threats—in fact, they may even be more susceptible to certain threats (e.g., perfectionism, competitive, or drive). This article has asserted that culture shapes character, yet culture can also corrupt character. Talented individuals of strong character who are placed in corrupt teams or systems often are not strong enough alone to maintain their

individual moral and performance character strengths. Talent and resources do not necessarily remove problems by themselves; in fact, they may simply lead to a different set of problems. Intentional culture assessment and development are essential, regardless of the human and material resources. The real world is messy, unpredictable, and still based in large part on human beings, who bring with them intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The development of our assessment and development theory and practice has evolved through the exploration of the most common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to achieve excellence with integrity and optimal performance in individuals, teams, and organizations.

Our early original work asserted that excellence with integrity is the synergy found at the intersection between what was originally called performance character and moral character (Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2006). Performance character competencies—including perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, initiative, creativity—are those habits that enable us to achieve our goals. At the same time, moral character competencies—such as caring, courage, respect, and responsibility—are those habits that ensure that our goals are achieved in ethical, fair, and harmonious ways. Moral character habits help protect, grow, and balance our inner-selves and our relationships with others. Based on this, two essential theoretical underpinnings should be kept in mind:

1. First, the performance character and moral character concept can be understood as a heuristic, not a strict empirical construct. Moral and performance character can be understood separately, but in reality are interdependent. For example, perseverance ensures integrity, curiosity is needed to experience empathy, critical thinking helps to apply fairness, honesty underlies enthusiasm, patience works to manage our drive,

loyalty directs our effort, diligences sustains citizenship, and resilience helps to maintain civility.

2. Second, the fundamental quest to achieve excellence with integrity involves navigating the balance, synergy, or harmony between moral and performance character, rather than just "more of each." Excellence with integrity is achieved by working hard and smart, by effectively managing emotions and energy, and by maintaining the right perspective. It is achieved by pushing oneself but doing so in a healthy and sustainable way. It is achieved through harmony between our drive for achievement and our need for relationships, through our fundamental need for both doing and being, through the joyful, fearless pursuit of excellence in a peaceful and centered way. In organizations, it is achieved by pursuing the team goals while seeking harmony and balance between the intrapersonal dynamics within oneself and the interpersonal dynamics between and among team members.

Performance character, moral character, intrapersonal, interpersonal—for short excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-work—these four domains represent the foundations of a dynamic process for achieving excellence with integrity, which is represented in Figure 2 below.

Mastery of this set of relationships is complex and dynamic and thus achieving excellence with integrity does not look identical for everyone, everywhere, and at all times. So, where one might conceive of the excellence with integrity as a single standard, it is actually a singular vision with a multitude of pathways and end-points. Even a quick glimpse at these and one is struck by the obvious challenge of mastering any one of these, let alone the challenge of mastering the harmony between all four. And yet, in every affiliated individual

Figure 2. Four domains to achieve excellence with integrity.

OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE — A SYNERGY OF:

EXCELLENCE
WORK ETHIC
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT
PROBLEM SOLVING
INNOVATION

INTEGRITY
FAIRNESS
RESPECT
RESPONSIBILITY
COURAGE

GROWTH & BALANCE
GROWTH MINDSET
ENGAGEMENT
RESILIENCE
STRESS MANAGEMENT

TEAMWORK & COMMUNITY
CIVILITY
LEADERSHIP
COMMUNICATION
COLLABORATION

and organization, the pathway to optimal performance is achieved through intentional development that pursues a synergy of these domains.

One metaphor for understanding these is to envision a wind turbine, in which wind turns propeller-like blades to spin a generator and create electrical power. The blades of a wind turbine must be individually strong and collectively balanced with one another. If a single blade is weak, it would break off due to the force of the wind. Equally important for turbine long-term performance is the balance between the blades, especially as the wind force increases and spins the blades faster. Similarly, when a team or organization works together in harmony, these four 'blades'— excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-work— generate power for achieving the performance goals of a team or organization. When these four domains are individually strong and collectively balanced, efficiency and longevity are produced for use in the service of the

mission performance goals. However, if these domains become individually weak, it creates an imbalance that produces less power, or possibly breaks down altogether.

The four domains can be broken down further into specific competencies to focus our development and assessment. These competencies are drawn from the Institute's field research and empirical knowledge about factors that contribute to organizational success, or detract from it when missing or underdeveloped. In our experience, these competencies are the catalyst, the hidden driver of optimal performance, in every field, profession, industry, and walk of life. As Koestenbaum asserted:

The future of industry demands employees and managers—white- and blue-collar workers alike—with highly developed character who understand loyalty, promote inventiveness, are at home with change, and are masters in the paradoxical craft of integrating

results and heart, and do it for the sake of the growth of their own souls, for personal fulfillment, not because the business threatens them if they fail. (Koestenbaum, 1991, p. 21)

A few important insights regarding our more evolved understanding of the Optimal Performance Pinwheel and contributing competencies are as follows:

1. The identification of more specific competencies within each domain allows for targeted program development and delivery. Ultimately, however, sustainable excellence generally results from the more nuanced vision of harmony and balance amongst the four domains. For example, stress management training for individuals can make a difference, but is strengthened in many instances by also focusing on communication, collaboration, and effective teamwork.

2. The answer regarding how to take these character competencies and instill them into individuals, in our experience, is not consistently or sustainably answered by the individual "self-help" approach. Instead, it can be asserted that the mechanism, lies in the culture. Culture shapes character. Therefore, intentional culture must embody these habits collectively as a mechanism for individual character development.

3. Finally, finding balance within and between the four domains is an ongoing process—not a stagnant destination. Finding optimal is a dynamic relationship requiring a never-ending process of action and reflection, which is why formative assessment approaches that continuously focus on inputs—the structural aspects of the process of development itself—such as culture assessment are so important and why the Institute embraces *forget perfect; find optimal* as an assessment and development mantra.

Thousands of years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1962) argued that virtue can be described as the middle between excess and deficiency. This age-old wisdom matters to today because when it comes to achieving excellence with integrity, it is about finding the balance between achieving the most favorable outcomes and the most favorable ways of doing so. Achieving excellence with integrity is about (a) the right degree of performance effort for the circumstances and the expectations; (b) the right relationship—with ourselves, with our colleagues or teammates, and with our circumstances; and (c) choosing right from wrong, and good over bad. However, the more difficult challenge of achieving excellence with integrity is about choosing the better:

1. Choosing between two good things.
2. Choosing that which leads to positive outcomes in both the short- and long-term.
3. Choosing what which is good for the individual and for the team or organization.

Choosing the better involves a discernment process, not simply the willpower to memorize and act upon the right choice. In the real world, optimal performance defies any one perfect standard response. What is the right amount or type of communication, honesty, courage, toughness? The answer, of course, is that it depends. Finding optimal is all about the process of establishing high expectations and choosing the best response, the response that considers the circumstances as well as differences in knowledge, ability, and sensibility. That is why it can be said to forget perfect, and find optimal. For most people driven by the pursuit of excellence, it is not easy to make peace with the forget perfect, and find optimal mantra and mindset. It seems that somehow this approach lowers the bar in not striving for perfection. However, others have affirmed the challenges to perfectionism in pursuit of excellence and integrity (Ben-Shahar, 2009; Guiberson, 2015). However, the notion of optimal performance has a

more nuanced understanding. By definition, perfect is the ideal, meaning beyond theoretical or practical improvement. It is known theoretically that there may exist some perfect response. However, when factoring in constraints of time, human and material resources, and varying capabilities and sensibilities, the perfect response can be hard to uncover—that which is beyond improvement. However, it is generally apparent what failure or an unacceptable solution looks like. The optimal response is that which is best suited to the performance goals, the situation or circumstance, the people involved, and the standards of excellence and integrity. Optimal is the best possible response for a given set of circumstances. In other words, optimal performance is the highest effectiveness that can be achieved with integrity. This is why it can be asserted that in its simplest form, optimal performance is excellence with integrity.

Optimal performance means meeting the highest standard of excellence without violating integrity. Stated differently, it implies that the "ends don't justify the means." Many high performing teams and organizations sense that the means, journey, or process to achieving their goals seems to lack integrity. Even if they are getting the results without violating ethical norms, the cost to themselves and to the team may not be right or fair, and does a disservice to the spirit. Fatigue, burnout, low morale, lack of civility, respect, and collegiality, lack of happiness, joy, and a lack of life balance—these are the types of symptoms that people note when they are describing the opposite of optimal performance. They often say, "we are either underperforming expectations or we are meeting expectations but doing so at a great cost to the individuals and the team," as well as "while we are not violating any legal rules or ethical norms, we are violating the rules and laws of our human nature."

Optimal is not the same thing everywhere and for everyone. Therefore, it can be argued that leading for optimal performance is informed by and determined relative to:

1. The unique organizational mission and values.
2. The team's specific goals and objectives.
3. The capabilities and sensibilities of team members.
4. The ever-changing day-to-day circumstances faced.

In *Switch*, Heath and Heath (2010) asserted that "what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity about what to do better or do differently" (p. 17). Too often, it is assumed that people are resistant, unwilling, or unable to make changes in their behaviors. In fact, change is more likely to occur when there is clarity about what to do differently or better. Individuals need the "what" (e.g., what I should do differently or better) as well as the "how" (e.g., how I can learn to implement this habit or skill in an optimal way amid the real-world challenges and circumstances that I may face).

Culture as Performance Shaping Input

The Excellence with Integrity Assessment and Development process starts by defining the "what" and the "how" in the form of optimal performance behaviors (OPBs) and practices. Optimal performance behaviors provide clarity regarding what the expected performance skills and mindset look, sound, and feel like in action, what team members are expected to do better or differently. Optimal performance behaviors represent the organization's desired performance competencies and mission values broken down into concrete actions that are contextualized for particular circumstances and individual capabilities and sensibilities. The first part of the assessment specifies the most common optimal performance competencies and actions (i.e., behaviors) organized thematically down around the four domains of excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-work. In this part, the assessment seeks to answer the question whether the people on

the team put the team values into action. This part simultaneously looks at whether the team implements the shared norms in their actions, as well as do the individuals on the team demonstrate the competencies required of them (in an aggregate form). This is both the collective culture and the collective character of the team.[1]

The second part asks the following: What is it that our leaders, coaches, or mentors do to develop an intentional culture that embraces and embodies our values/virtues? How do the leaders develop the team/organizational culture? These can be called optimal performance practices, which serve to define and contextualize expectations for leadership practices that leaders, mentors, or coaches need to engage in to lead their teams and organizations. These practices form the collective habits (or culture) through which individual character competencies are shaped. In other words, optimal performance practices represent the intentional culture shaping inputs used by leaders to shape the culture, which in turn shapes the individual and collective habits (i.e., the OPBs).

Apart from powerful personalities, our organization has been searching for the mechanism (what is sometimes called "the operating system") for consistent replication of best practice. The most recent iteration of these can be described as the "CHAMP Approach." In essence, this is what great leaders engage in to flesh out and standardize expectations for themselves. While there are nearly unlimited particular examples or manifestations, they roughly fall into these four categories. Great leaders shape character by shaping the culture through *Clarity, Habit, Accountability and Mindset (which leads to) Performance (CHAMP)*. The

1   The Excellence with Integrity Institute has also created customized versions of this standard instrument that translates excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-work categories into the more specific language and expectations of various organizations' particular values/virtues, including a version for Stanford University Athletics around its department values and a Jesuit version being used in athletics at Le Moyne College and The University of Scranton.

acronym helps to convey simply the four key types of practices for shaping culture and character. However, the implementation process is more nuanced than a simple acronym would suggest (e.g., the practices are not always done in the same order or even sequentially). What follows is an overview of the contribution of each of the four major categories in the CHAMP heuristic, presented in their most logical flow (which is altered to meet the specific implementation circumstances and needs).

Establishing Clear, Specific, Contextualized Expectations (CLARITY). Clarity and communication about expectations is the single most frequent driver (or preventer) of optimal performance cited in almost every affiliated team, group, or organization. Setting, communicating, and reinforcing expectations is a never-ending process for those seeking to achieve optimal performance. It includes the following:

1. Identifying the needed value, skill, or competency.
2. Setting clear optimal performance expectations;
3. Contextualizing expectations for the specific situation, event, or circumstances.
4. Clarifying expectation for particular roles.
5. Continuously clarifying, contextualizing, reiterating and adjusting expectations as needed.

Regardless of the values, skills, or practices that have been identified as essential, optimal performance development begins with establishing shared expectations for the group and for each individual. This means being specific and concrete when clarifying expectations around the most common circumstances currently faced by the group.

If, for example, a core value of a team or organization is honesty, identifying it as such is a good starting point. But it is not enough. Honesty is not one set of expectations but many, depending on the context, circumstances, and expectations. Optimal performance

requires clearly setting and communicating important big picture expectations, as well as urgent, mission critical expectations.

Habit Development Through Targeted Practice (HABIT). Leading for optimal performance is most definitely about the formation of habits. Leaders shape culture and culture shapes character. When it comes to the formation of habit, clarity of expectations and communication are important but not sufficient. Habit is not formed by knowledge about a skill alone. Habit is formed by an experience of a targeted skill. In fact, habit is achieved through targeted practice, or what the expertise literature refers to as "deliberate practice." Habits are formed from intense and intentional real-world practice simulations. These simulations begin with clarity of expectations—clear models of what the skills and values look like optimally implemented for the current circumstances and expectations. Deliberate practice is often accompanied by mental training and preparation, the mindset development that visualizes what one can expect and a plan for response. But then one must engage in practice simulations that are equal to, or greater than, what one is likely to face in the real world. This practice must be monitored and mentees must be given timely, growth-focused feedback including praise and polish. Leading for optimal performance around the formation of HABIT includes the following:

1. Engaging in deliberate practice of essential skills.
2. Intentionally creating real-world practice simulations.
3. Increasing intensity of deliberate practice and monitoring improvement.

Mental Preparation and Mindset Formation (MINDSET). Leading for optimal performance requires the formation of habits of mind and heart, or "mindset." The mindset aspect of leadership is all about the mental preparation practices designed to develop focused, tough-minded individuals who understand and accept that goal achievement will rarely occur in a straight line. Leading for optimal performance around mindset includes practices that are designed to emotionally visualize likely situations, to frame and reframe mistakes and missteps, and to focus on controlling what's controllable—and letting go of what's outside of one's control. In *Mindset*, Carol Dweck presents the research on the importance of having "growth mindset" for thriving in every aspect of human development and performance (Dweck, 2006). Adopting a growth mindset for any new, different, or difficult situation can help people and organizations learn, grow, and improve in a way that increases our human capacity. The experience of adversity has the potential to make us stronger and wiser, with new skills and strength of character than could ever have developed without the experience.

Overall, the optimal performance approach is centered on growing, learning, improving, failing faster, and making adjustments. Expectations have been set for the circumstances, for the goals, and for the various roles of team members. Only rarely in the real world do things go as planned. Thus, the mindset for optimal performance is one of visualizing prior to entering the situation, and preparing mentally to make the adjustment, to grow and let go, to focus on what's in our control. If a growth mindset is the habit of mind required for optimal performance, emotional toughness is the habit of heart within our concept of mindset that is needed for optimal performance. A growth mindset in certain ways requires, and is certainly strengthened and enhanced by emotional toughness. Author Jim Loehr describes the importance of emotional toughness competencies such as emotional flexibility, emotional responsiveness, emotional resiliency, and emotional strength (Loehr, 1994), all of which contribute to the overall mindset needed for optimal performance.

Leading for optimal performance around mindset uses the experiences and challenges of everyday living to stretch and strengthen the habits of mind and heart

needed for the challenges faced, and as preparation for those which may be faced in the future. Leading for mindset is like being a strength coach for mind and heart, using every single experience of life to develop inner strength and capacity needed to survive and thrive. The optimal performance approach requires leaders to seek optimal intensity, when stretching and pushing are just right. Too much results in anxiety, fear, and neurosis; too little results in softness, selfishness, and weakness. Optimal Performance leadership for MINDSET includes the following:

1. Developing a forget perfect-find optimal, grow-and-let-go growth mindset.
2. Visualizing the situation response scenarios.
3. Continuously refocusing on controllables, reframing challenges, and emphasizing quick recovery.
4. Examining conscious belief systems.
5. Practicing positive self-talk.

Support and Challenge (ACCOUNTABILITY). Expectations have been set. Conditions for deliberate practice (real-world simulation) have been established. Now comes the support and challenge needed to ensure that expectations are met—and course correction occurs when they are not. Accountability is one of the hallmarks of leading for optimal performance. Clearly, great performers in every walk of life excel at holding themselves accountable for meeting their standards and goals. But at some point all great performers require the support and challenge of others—especially around areas of struggle and weakness. Accountability is not simply someone making sure you do what you said you would, but in the ideal it also involves teaching, correcting, and inspiring. The most effective accountability practices balance honesty and respect with unwavering commitment to excellence. Leading for optimal performance requires accountability that is rooted in truth and trust, leaving no question about the gap between current performance and ideal

standards. Accountability means accurate feedback that does not overlook details, accept excuses, or waver on expectations, but also is delivered without embarrassing, insulting, or otherwise demotivating. Accountability through support and challenge not only points out what you've done wrong, but provides the do better-do differently feedback that is specific, tactical, and replicable.

Accurate measurement and benchmarking of performance is essential for accountability. Accountability requires feedback processes that promote honest self-reflection and ensure that the individual leaves with a sense of what to do better or differently to more optimally meet the standards. The danger of isolated self-evaluation can be over-estimating strengths; however, it can also result in underestimating strengths and over-playing weaknesses. Goal partners, accountability pairs, small groups, and the like are needed to create a culture of trust and truth where self-evaluation is healthy and constructive. Leading for optimal performance through accountability requires both challenge ("that is not good enough") and support ("here is what you need to do better or differently"). Optimal performance leadership for accountability includes the following:

1. Providing support and challenge on the development of essential skills.
2. Providing constructive criticism and "do better-do differently" feedback that is specific, tactical, and replicable.
3. Using performance data for accountability, teaching, correcting, and inspiring growth.

The second part of the culture assessment captures most common optimal performance practices organized thematically around the CHAMP heuristic, primarily in terms of inputs designed to shape clarity and communication of expectations, habits, accountability, and mindset.

The Institute views LTCC and CHAMP as applied theoretical models that are universal. Applied means that the models strive less to fully describe reality with all its nuances. Rather, they are heuristics that identify and focus on the core factors and mechanisms that leaders leverage to improve performance of their teams, doing so with integrity toward customers and team members). They are universal because they apply equally to all teams and organizations as long as they are truly pursuing excellence with integrity (aka, optimal performance)—not merely saying they want to do it. The universal LTCC and CHAMP models underlie the core structure and content of the Excellence with Integrity Assessment approach.

The Theory Applied as Assessment and Development

This section demonstrates how the theoretical underpinnings manifest themselves in the Culture Assessment Surveys, focusing on the Sport Team Culture version. The Excellence with Integrity Culture Assessment Surveys gather formative data for benchmarking and continuous improvement of team culture as well as and leadership and coaching practices.

Data is collected by a cohort approach (i.e., by team, department, or organization). For each team, there is a survey for team members and for team leaders with parallel content (i.e., the same questions). Team members see a section asking about their fellow teammates' behaviors and a section asking about their leaders/coaches/manager practices. Leaders, coaches, and managers report on behaviors among members of their team, as well as their own practices. This parallel structure and content allow for data on the same items from two perspectives.

The survey does not ask individuals "Are you hard working?" or "Are you selfless?" rather, it asks for the team, group, or cohort perspective: Rate the performance of your teammates on the following. In a predecessor assessment, respondents were asked to rate themselves, then in subsequent section to rate their teammates or classmates. It was found that the self-ratings were generally high and flat (impacted by the social desirability phenomenon); however, the ratings of classmates and teammates showed lower means and significant variation. Similarly, in workplace settings, employees have tremendous skepticism and fear about how individual data will be used against them: Asking questions about individual performance would undermine the culture of trust and result in useless data from the perspective of seeking insights for improvement.

Thus, the instructions ask team members to think about their team and teammates. The survey also asks respondents to reflect about the general experience—meaning usual or typical—performance. The survey is designed to have people thinking about their Team Culture which is another way of saying "Our patterns, Our habits, or Our norms. This approach asks respondents not to focus on a single or random instance, a bad day or a poor interpersonal exchange. The survey focuses on stable strengths of the team rather than inconsistent behaviors or weaknesses. In some instances, respondents are asked about how their team responds to negative incidents. If no such incidents happened to them or their team in this time period, they are instructed to reflect on how they believe their team members would react if something like that were to happen.

Safety and trust as foundational to the process cannot be underestimated, since social desirability and fear often contribute to data that is used as a weapon against individuals (or team leaders), rather than as a tool for improvement. Our third party involvement as the collectors and processors of the data further helps in this regard. Part of the survey process is to assure respondents that the survey responses are anonymous (our collection method is indeed

anonymous). Interestingly, this method presented some concerns from coaches and leaders who worried that anonymity would encourage team members to be unfair and uncharitable. In fact, that has not been our experience; instead, team members seem to be more negative toward themselves in certain areas compared to coaches. Qualitative comments help corroborate quantitative insights (e.g., determining if the issue is a person problem or a team trend/issue).

Organizing presentation of the data around our optimal performance framework is essential for engendering trust in the process of the data's use as a continuous improvement tool. As mentioned above, the fear factor or social desirability phenomenon, is in part driven by a belief that the actual purpose of the assessment is not human and organizational development but rather individual reward or punishment, merit or demerit. When asserting that culture eats strategy for lunch, this also applies to assessment strategy. If the culture does not believe assessment results are used exclusively for culture and character development, assessment will distract, divide, and undermine the very culture it is intended to build. There is also strong resistance to the idea of character report cards and even to 180- and 360-degree assessment processes. This is in part drawing upon a perfectionist tendency to think you are either honest or not, hard working or not. In other words, individual-targeting assessments are perceived as a judgement of me as a good or a bad person, not the effectiveness with which I put my values in action amid real-world challenges.

The presentation of the data with interpretive help is also decidedly pragmatic. Our organization works hard to stay focused on improvement, striving to help participants efficiently move from the what, to the so what, to the now what—what does the data say, why does this matter to our vision, values, and performance goals, and what can be done better or differently based on the data. Similar to your annual physical, the data

presentation is aligned with the goal of thriving health within team culture, rather than just identifying life-threatening problems. It would certainly be an oversight to respond to any one item without putting it into the larger context. The intention is not to identify bad people to get rid of necessarily, nor is it searching for a reason to get out of doing intentional culture formation. The goal is to promote growth in the culture, character, leadership and organizational development. The summary reports provide a series of dashboard scale summaries and data detail sections, along with over-time comparisons when available.

A typical Division II or III athletic department would have 18 to 20 teams, whereas a robust Division I might have more than 30. In our nearly 10 years of doing this assessment, no two teams have been the same. There is always a pattern of cohort movement that is particular to that team and its performance and circumstances that which contributes to face validity from coaches whereby they consistently affirm that the data reflects their team. This has been apparent in recent national championship caliber teams, where the data exhibit different patterns than an outsider might expect. For example, the reports detect angst in the culture, a partying subculture, or discomfort in giving and receiving constructive criticism. If growth is the only evidence of life, what the reports often show is the culture growth, or culture rot going on beneath the surface, that often precedes great breakthroughs, or great decline. In many athletic settings, the process is benefiting from the wide number of team samples—not one team, but 18, 20, and 30 plus teams. In addition, the advantage of long-time trends collected over a number of years has also become increasingly evident. Time is a much neglected aspect of something that is essential for understanding growth in culture, character, and leadership. Single time point evaluations, regardless of their empirical rigor, are limited. Trends provide invaluable insights into problem patterns and growth trajectories.

The formative assessment survey works accurately by showing a scan of the culture, but one that must be contextualized with other kinds of data such as sport and academic performance, observations, and other existing metrics and measures. Best practice in evaluation has often advocated triangulation of data sources and data types. When it comes to the evaluation of culture, character, leadership, and organizational development it is rare to observe strong iterative, mixed-method evaluations as the norm. Our culture assessment takes the first step by gathering qualitative and quantitative data, while also putting at least two key stakeholder perspectives next to each other for comparison.

Nuances of Assessment as Development

Our assessment approach is formative—an integral, indispensable component of organizational and leadership development. Involving team and organizational leaders in the process of reviewing the survey results helps educate them about the key aspects of what they need to do as leaders to develop the culture and character of their team as well as what their team members need to believe and to do to pursue excellence with integrity. This means helping them develop as leaders by teaching the core structural factors and mechanisms that ensure team performance—and doing so not only through lecture, but also by deliberate practice using the data to create plans for improvement (personal and collective), implementing those plans, and repeating the cycle continuously.

Leadership development programs often focus on developing personal qualities of future leaders, or enhancing individual leadership skills of current leaders. Yet, they fail to describe the process of leadership as a whole—what leaders actually need to do in a systemic way. Taken together, LTCC and CHAMP describe the process in practical terms. Working with the survey results that are organized around the components of LTCC and CHAMP, leaders internalize the knowledge summarized in these models, they learn what they need to do and to have their team members do to pursue better performance, and they practice the how by putting this knowledge into action in their daily work with their teams. Because formative assessment is a development process, it can be argued that while doing a one-time baseline assessment is useful, only by engaging in ongoing assessment and development process will leaders master leadership skills in practice and will shape the culture and character of their team or organization.

The use of data to drive assessment and development ideally must model what it attempts to measure. In other words, if measurement of leadership, character, and culture does not model fairness, safety, trust, personal and collective accountability, then regardless of its psychometric properties, it may undermine the very thing it seeks to measure and improve. The process is one that most coaches tell us they see as fair, even if it does not always conclude that everything they do or say is perfect. Student-athletes believe it has given them voice to course-correct team cultures that are missing the mark on both excellence and integrity, which has in turn lead to universal, targeted, and intensive programming to build up the needed assets. They have also been able to advocate for themselves when coaching practices threaten the excellence or integrity of their experience. In lower performing years, the culture assessment has saved coaches whose culture was strong in spite of their on-the-field record. And, in high performing years, the culture assessment has saved players from coaching practices that threatened health, well-being, and sustained excellence. To date, having collected hundreds of reports in numerous departments and settings, there has not been a single experience where the report did not accurately capture the culture as seen by essential and informed members of the team or organization. Nor have there been a single instance of an attempt or a strategy design to "game it" by any stakeholder group and make things

look better or worse than they are. This includes the very real concern coaches have that the players who did not get playing time they wanted or who had other conflicts with the coaches or department would use the survey for a scorched earth personal retaliation.

One essential caveat to the claims above about the fairness and efficacy of the approach: it works best when it used in cultures, or by leaders, committed to growth in culture, character, and leadership. All of our clients desire improvement in performance outcomes. At the same time, they are also committed to a "margin through mission," or excellence with integrity approach. This means a commitment to the time and focus being on the culture, character, and leadership. It means strong collegiality and mentoring relationships amongst coaches and leaders, since the defining and refining of OPBs and practices is ongoing. The assessment truly works when it does not stop with a report card, but begins further exploration and dialogue through strong mentoring relationships.

The theoretical roots of this instrument are not accidental to its strategic intent and use by organizations. The data yielded by the instrument and the process matter to stakeholders committed to mission-first, culture-first approaches. Beyond its validity and reliability, it must be pointed out as to who is using this instrument and how they are using it, as the process is vital to monitoring and improving their intentional culture efforts. Over time, the athletic departments and teams served have improved winning percentages, they have improved academic performance behaviors, reduced problem behaviors, and even improved fund development efforts by demonstrating a mission-driven value add through athletics. These are supported by multiple independent settings over a period of 7 to 10 years. However, they are limited by our dependence on small samples, correlational outcomes, and more of a case study methodology. Our approach is by no means a panacea, nor does it dispute the myriad social science

limitations related to our claims. In this issue dedicated to a dialogue about assessment and development of culture, character, and leadership, our work instead represents a potential evolution in assessment design thinking which points to proof of concept for an entirely different way of thinking about the role of assessment for development of leadership, culture, and character.

Affiliated organizations consider the Institute "strength and conditioning coaches for culture, character, and leadership." This description can be likened to the field of physical strength and conditioning as a comparison. Today in intercollegiate athletics, strength and conditioning coaches are an invaluable part of performance excellence. However, it is a short history lesson to understand the journey to today (Shurley & Todd, 2001). The field cites 1969 as the first year when a formal strength and conditioning coach was used by a college football program. In 1978, the National Strength Coaches Association was formed. Much of the early days of the field were spent learning to measure and quantify something that everyone thought they understood, and very few knew how to systematically measure or develop.

It is clear that our evolution to today's culture assessment and development has the potential to change forever the viewpoint regarding our role in the formation of character, culture, and leadership. Our sole purpose in measuring it is to develop it. There are many who believe that the push to improve organizational and team outcomes through quantitative measures has created a culture of gaming and manipulation (Muller, 2018). Our goal is not to create an assessment weapon to be used against the individuals and teams. Our goal is not to create metrics, measures, or processes that justify the existence or power of a character trait, or skill, or mindset. Our goal is to help leaders shape team culture that is aligned with mission values, which in turn develops individual and collective character

habits, which in time advances performance outcomes. The Institute acknowledges that our process and outcomes deserve additional scrutiny, and the support and challenge of a wider community. Our hope in this article is to invite both. However, for the scrutiny and community to truly help those served through our work, there must be a fundamental gestalt change in our view of assessment, as assessment for development. In other words, it will not help our work to improve or serve others if the critique of our work is simply that is not what assessment is. Critique and community that would serve the field include an expanded focus around assessment tools and methods utilizing assessment as strength and conditioning for the development of culture, character, and leadership.

Assessment for development requires more than good science and rigorous methods. It requires tools for more efficiently and consistently putting the power of character and culture to work, since if our experience tells us anything it affirms that culture shapes character and it most certainly eats strategy for lunch. Since culture eats strategy for lunch and given that culture, character and leadership are indispensable to achieving performance goals, our work will remain steadfast in advancing a field with the theoretical, empirical, and practical tools to see strength and conditioning coaches for culture, character, and leadership grow and flourish in the next 25 years.

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