

# The Motivational Climate in Elite Sport

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## Introduction

The motivational climate (Ames, 1992) is a psychological concept that reflects the situational factors that influence motivation.

The perceived motivational climate can foster intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. The situational factors associated with intrinsic motivation are termed a mastery climate, those associated with extrinsic motivation, a performance climate. Intrinsic motivation has been deemed desirable due to the display of adaptive behaviours such as higher rates of

- long-term participation
- persistence
- effort (Vallerand, Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Due to the promotion of intrinsic motivation as desirable at all levels of sport, the use of a mastery motivational climate has progressed from youth sport through to elite sport. However, extrinsic motivation has been associated with success in elite sport (Chantal, Guay, Dobreva-Martinova & Vallerand, 1996) and competition has been associated with increased levels of intrinsic motivation (Frederick-Reaccino & Schuster-Smith, 2003).

Due to the minimal amount of research on the appropriateness of a mastery motivational climate at the elite level, this study examines the use of the motivational climate in a successful elite sporting program to establish if a mastery, performance or combination of the two is used at this level of sport.

## Method

Four elite coaches were interviewed to investigate the nature of the motivational climate they endeavored to create. Athletes (N=18) completed the PMCSQ-2 (Newton, Duda & Yin, 2000) to examine their perceptions of the motivational climate created by their coaches. In addition, ten athletes were interviewed to elicit further information regarding the perceived motivational climate and their preferences with regard to the contributing elements.

Content analysis was performed on interview data and was grouped as either mastery or performance elements consistent with the TARGET model (Epstein, 1988, 1989) and the autonomy-supportive coaching model (Mazzeau & Vallerand, 2003).



## Literature cited

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## Results

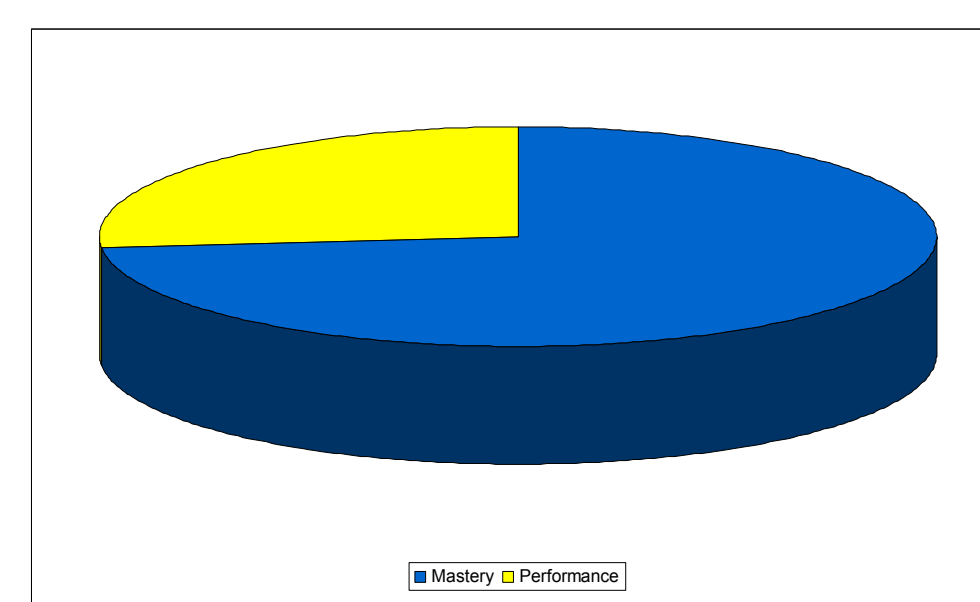


Figure 1. Mastery and performance motivational climate elements analysed from coach interviews.

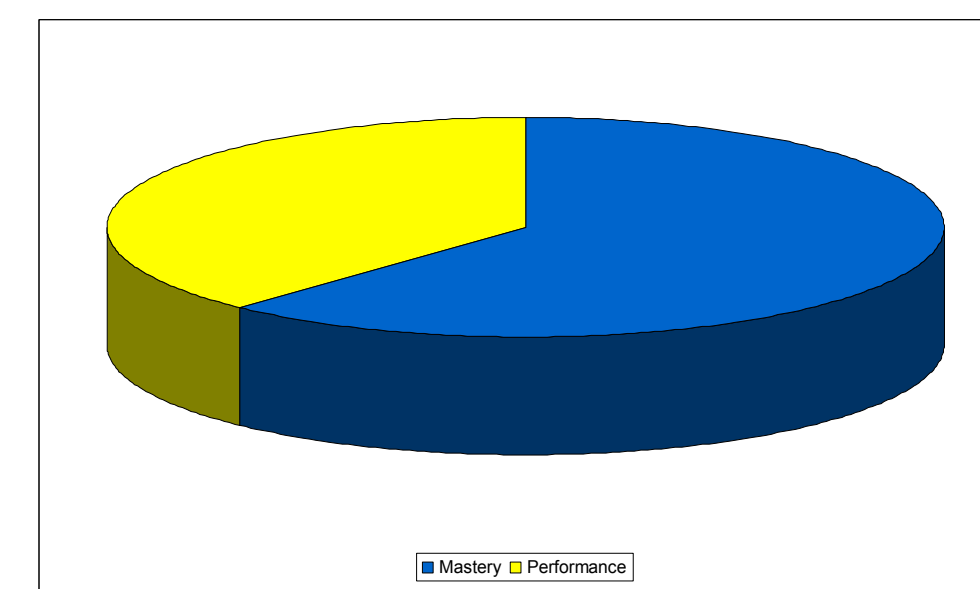


Figure 2. Mean PMCSQ-2 Scores for Athlete Perceptions of the Motivational Climate.

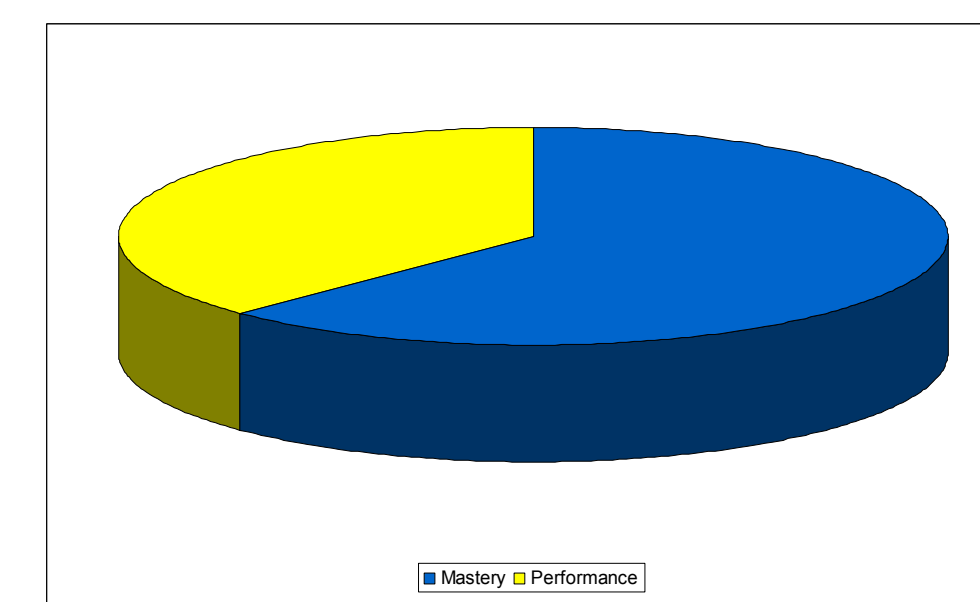


Figure 3. Mastery and Performance Elements of the Motivational Climate Valued By Interviewed Athletes.

## Conclusions

Analysis of the interviews revealed that the coaches attempted to create a climate that had elements of both performance and mastery climates. The athlete responses to the questionnaire showed that the coaches' attempts to create a mixed climate were successful with means of 3.8 for mastery climate and 2.3 for performance climate perception on a 5 point Likert scale. The athlete interviews also confirmed that coaches employed elements of both mastery and performance climates and that this was considered appropriate and effective.

These results indicate that the exclusive use of a mastery motivational climate is inappropriate in elite sport. The use of a mixed motivational climate of mastery and performance elements could therefore be expanded to lower levels of sport where winning is one of the main aims of the participants instead of merely inclusive participation.

Inclusion of mastery motivational climate elements of

- emphasis on improvement
- errors being seen as learning opportunity
- effort
- providing a rationale for tasks
- providing opportunities to exercise autonomy
- task design that created challenge

and performance motivational climate elements of

- acknowledge the importance of the aim of winning
- comparison with others
- competition in training

were the motivational climate elements most valued by these elite athletes and should be considered by coaches of performance programmes in sport as a method of fostering motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic.



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## For further information

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