

Leadership Case Study

In March 2018, the men's Australian cricket team was involved in a ball-tampering scandal during and after the third Test match against South Africa in Cape Town when Cameron Bancroft, a player, was caught by television cameras trying to rough up one side of the ball to make it swing in flight, an illegal thing to do in cricket. Captain Steve Smith and vice-captain David Warner were found to be involved and all three were banned from international cricket for 12 months by Cricket Australia, the governing body for professional and amateur cricket in Australia. Although he was found not to have been involved, Australia's coach, Darren Lehmann, announced he would step down from his role following the scandal. The following article by Sam Clench, Editor, News Limited Australia appeared online couple of days after the incident. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

Sam Clench, Editor, News Limited Australia (March 26th, 2018)

The first words out of Steve Smith's mouth could not have been more revealing. As he and ball-tamperer-in-chief Cameron Bancroft fronted the cameras amid the putrid fallout from Australia's cheating scandal, Smith's deficient leadership was laid bare.

"Steven, Cameron, do you want to explain to us what we saw on the television cameras today, and what's happened since?" the first questioner asked.

The Australian captain immediately turned to Bancroft, a rookie with only eight Tests to his name.

"Do you want to explain?"

As we would soon learn, Bancroft had not acted alone. He was merely the one selected to carry out the harebrained scheme endorsed by Australia's leadership group, including Smith and vice-captain David Warner. Smith, as the head of that group, was ultimately responsible. It was his job to explain what had happened and own up to it. Yet at the first opportunity to take responsibility, he palmed off the question to someone else. Perhaps it was fitting. Having decided to cheat earlier in the day, Smith could have done the dirty deed himself. Failing that, he at least could have asked a senior player like Warner to do it for him. Instead, he threw the most junior member of his team under the bus. That isn't the act of a leader.

I'm not suggesting Bancroft is a victim. He is one of the villains. Most cricketers half his age would have too much backbone to cheat, whatever the pressure from their captain — and for all we know the plan was his idea. But whatever the details, the far more disturbing issue here is a staggering failure of leadership at all levels of Australian cricket, starting with Smith. When he did finally speak at that press conference, his words made it clear he just doesn't get it.

"We saw this as such an important game. We've obviously seen the ball reversing quite a lot throughout this series and the ball just didn't look like it was going to go. That's a mistake on our behalf," he said.

No. Leaving a ball that clatters into your off stump is a mistake. Dropping an easy catch is a mistake. Conspiring with your teammates to gain an unfair advantage by cheating? That betrays a shocking lack of respect for the sport, and for the other team. It is the Australian cricketers' "win at all costs" attitude, which manifested for so long in constant sledging and abuse of their opponents, taken to its natural, ugly conclusion. Smith's desperation to win "such an important game" doesn't make his cheating any better. In fact, it shows exactly why he is unfit to lead. Leadership is about more than winning. It is about being able to win — and lose — with grace.

The toxic team culture is the captain's responsibility — and the coach's. Which brings us to the conspicuously quiet Darren Lehmann.

"The coach isn't involved. It was purely the leadership group and the players who came up with this," Smith insisted.

That is hard to believe, but let's assume Lehmann really did know nothing. That means his senior players, including his captain and vice-captain, cooked up a scheme to cheat behind his back. It means Lehmann has no control over his team. It means his team doesn't respect him. Another failure of leadership. And then there is Cricket Australia CEO James Sutherland, who hadn't even bothered to talk to the Australian captain when he fronted his own press conference hours after Smith's. On every level, from Lehmann's silence to Sutherland's slowness to Smith's delusional talk about "moving on", Australian cricket took forever to comprehend the true nature of this scandal.

Inside the team's bubble, maybe the whole thing seems overblown. As my colleague Jai Bednall rightly points out, under cricket's rules, ball tampering is a sin roughly equivalent with running on the pitch or making physical contact with an opponent. Not great, but not exactly murder. Apparently, our cricketers can't see that this scandal is about more than the crime itself. Very few of the people who have ripped into Smith these past few days particularly care about the condition of the ball in a cricket match. What they do care about is the character of the Australian team, which has been exposed as deeply rotten. "It won't happen ever again under my leadership," Smith said.

Well, no. Because it is excruciatingly obvious that the only way to fix this is to change the leadership.

Questions

1. Assess the leadership style of Mr. Steven Smith with respect to Blake and Mouton's managerial grid.
2. What are the reasons for the failure of Mr. Smith's leadership? How he should have acted differently after the controversy took place?
3. What type of leadership style (Kurt Lewin's) do you attribute to the coach Darren Lehmann? Explain.
4. "Responsibility is absolute". Explain this principle of delegation with respect to the above case.