

Performance Enhancement Systems

Think Training

Behind the “Stress Profile”

Crampton, J 2006

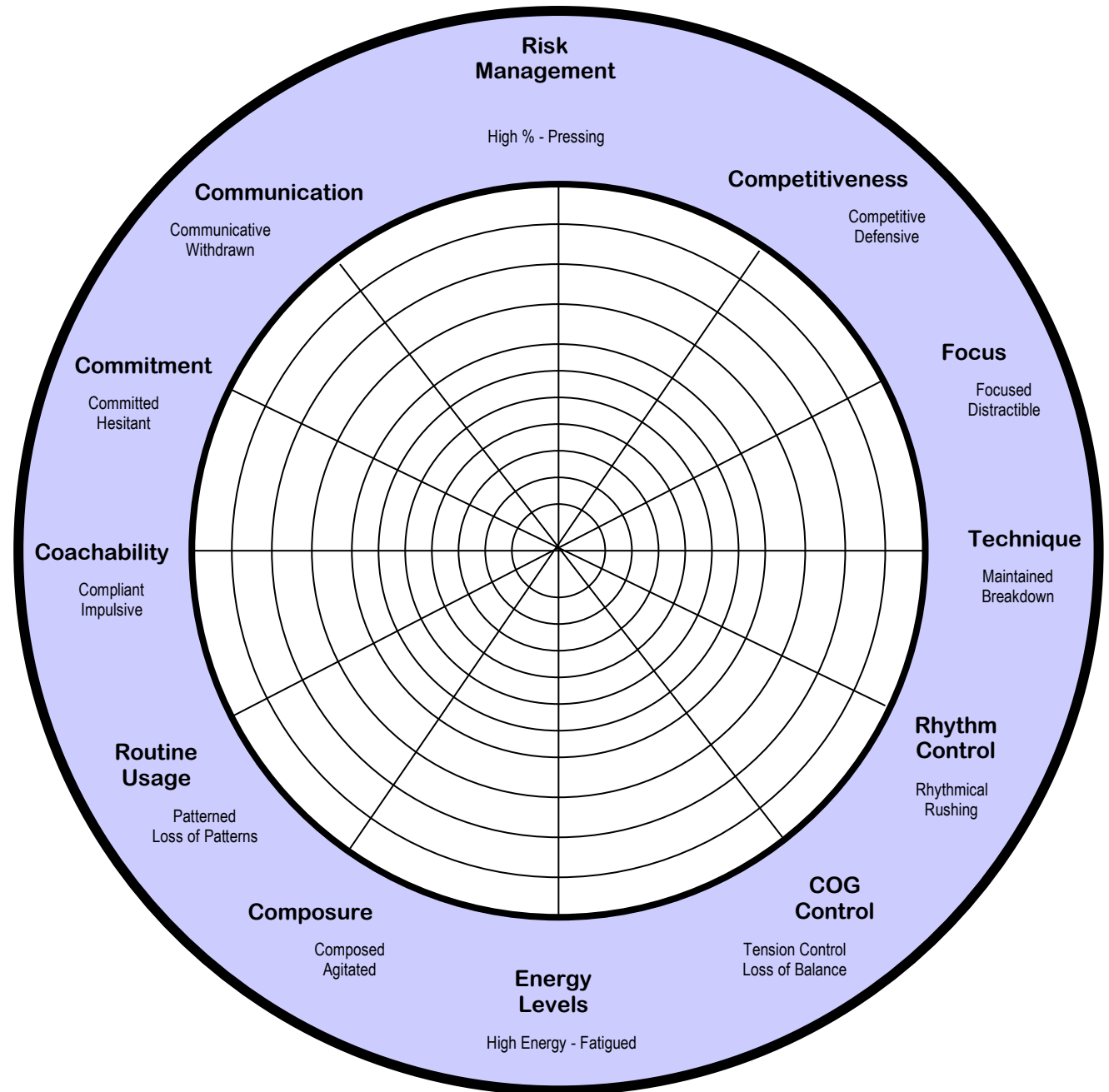
The "Stress Profile" evolved from discussions over a number of years post the Sydney Olympic Games, and perhaps rekindled by the infamous "lay down Sally" performance by the Australian Women's 8 Rowing Team at the Athens Olympic Games.

With many allegations of Sally Robbins being "un-Australian" in her performance, "letting the team down", the question arose about how to ensure such a situation would never happen again.

For a discussion on the key issue of how Robbins was actually given a seat in that boat for the Medal row, see Crampton's analysis in the terms of the classic James Reason "Expert Errors" literature.

The essence of this Stress Profile is found in these questions:

- What predictors are there for performance under pressure?
- Do individual athletes have typical patterns of reactions to pressure situations?
- Can we develop projects for skill and personal development projects from this perspective?



The “spider web” chart identifies the 12 characteristics or “constructs” that Crampton identifies from his experience working with Olympic and World Championship level athletes from the early 1980s until a series of consultancies in Singapore led to the creation of this version of the Stress Profile.

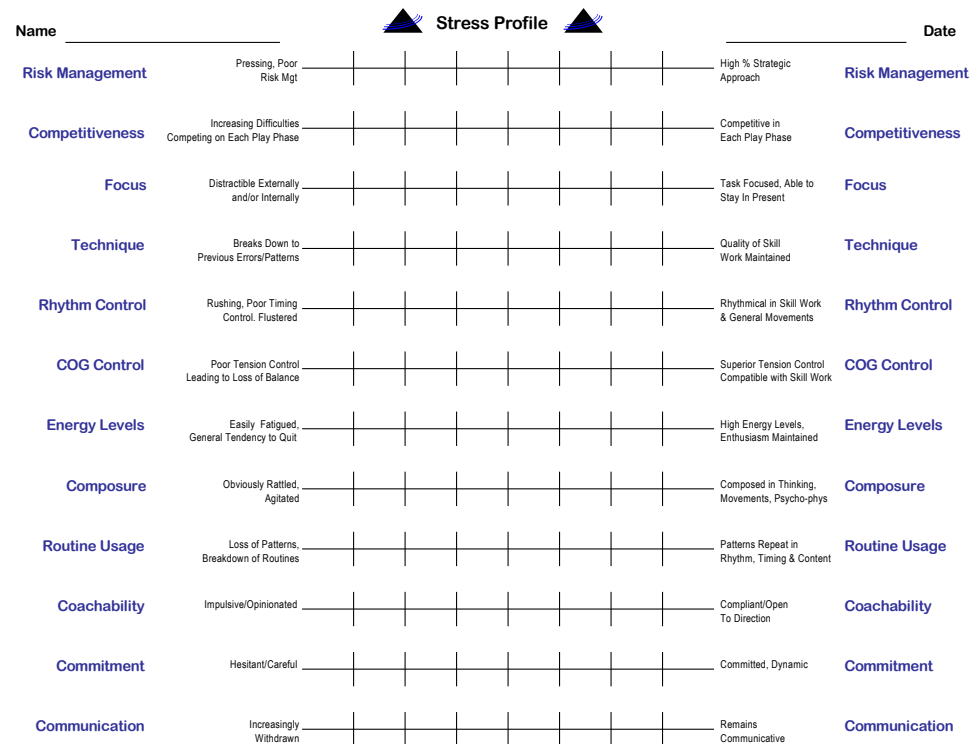
The use of this Stress Profile for comparison between individuals has never been advocated or recommended. The key issue, of course, is the lack of any empirical evidence to support the contention that these 12 constructs actually weigh on any notional measure of successful performance. The contention that the constructs are in fact predictive of likely better outcomes in competition are based on observations made of elite performers in competition settings over almost 20 years.

What Are the Descriptors of High & Low “Scores” for each Construct?

The use of the Stress Profile to represent the current status of an individual required a series of continuum scales to describe the extremes of each construct.

These scales were not simply a matter of low to high, but expressed the kinds of opposing behaviour patterns seen by effective through to sub-optimal performers in each of the constructs.

The establishment of an individual profile has been used to identify components requiring improvement during the individual’s upcoming campaign.



Breaking down the constructs

Risk Management

The individual's characteristic approach at managing risks under pressure
"Pressing", or attempting to force a result
Takes a "High Percentage" or "low risk approach in the face of challenging situations

Competitiveness

Ability / tendency to compete in every successive play phase
Increasing difficulty in "staying in the present" as pressure builds
Ability to segment the activity / job and remain task focused despite the presence of serious distractions

Focus

The individual's "attentional style" – cf Nideffer's TAIS
Increasingly distractable – externally or internally
Task focused, able to stay in present

Technique

Impact on skill production, including quality, accuracy, international standard
Breaks down to previous errors / patterns
Quality of skill work maintained

Rhythm Control

Ability to display / control the essential rhythm of their movements under demand
Rushing, poor timing control
Flustered
Rhythmical in skill work & general movements

Centre of Gravity (COG) Control

Ability to retain control of their psycho-physiology, and so their balance, tension levels and flow of their COG in skill production
Poor tension control leading to loss of balance
superior tension control compatible with skill work

Energy Levels

Displayed and felt enthusiasm for continuing the effort as fatigue and challenge rises
Easily fatigued
General tendency to quit
high energy levels
enthusiasm maintained

Composure

Ability to stay in the present and produce rhythmical movements in keeping with personal style

Loss of patterns

Breakdown of routines

composed in thinking, movements

psycho-physiological systems in control

Routine Usage

Presence of mind to use and maintain trust in routines and sub-routines under challenge

Loss of patterns

Breakdown of routines

patterns repeat in rhythm, timing

& content

Coachability

Attitude to, openness to input from coach when under challenge, likelihood of acting on advice

Impulsive / opinionated

Entitled to an opinion, just not qualified to express it

compliant, open to direction & advice

Commitment

Apparent intention to maintain effort levels under demand, driven by lifestyle / campaign management skills

Hesitant / careful

Trouble fitting life into sport

committed. Dynamic

organises life around sport

Communication

Tendency to remain communicative under increasing demand

Increasingly withdrawn

remains communicative

It is feasible to go through further reductionist approach and to identify a wider range of subtending skills, capabilities, understandings, and attitudes for each area. Typically I use this to identify projects for a performer to embrace within the context of the campaign plan they are following. Accordingly, there is a lot of conversation that goes along with settling on where they actually “score” on the continuums, and what observations have led to the rating.

There are some additional resources that facilitate the creation of a profile – a table linked to a graphic that creates the “spider web” diagram.

Central to the use of this as a “diagnostic tool” is the concept that performance is “measurable” in each area, and typically there are discussions about goal setting that follow from each area, including ways to measure progress towards those goals. These goals are couched in terms of “being projects”. The measures can be as simple as times, reaction times, “completions”, “strings”, or can move to higher order factors that require video, radar systems, 3D Motion Analysis systems, etc to assess.

Experience indicates that individuals can be very mixed in their relative abilities across the skills areas. The assessment process is restricted to considering “performance under pressure”. The resulting profile is then termed the individual’s “Stress Profile”, or typical pattern of behaviour under demand.