

## Sir Clive Woodward

### The Facilitation of Achievement

David Turner

## Reflective Questions

- What are the **contextual or personal background influences** upon Woodward's practice?
- What are his **greatest strengths**, and **potential weaknesses**?
- What are the **characteristics of a success culture**, such as that created by Woodward?
- How did it go **so right** with England 2003, and **so wrong** with Lions 2005?
- Why does English/British sport seem (mostly) **incapable of sustained international success**?

## Rugby Career

### Playing (Centre)

- 1974 Harlequins
- 1979-85 Leicester Tigers
- 1985-90 Manley (Australia)

### International Caps

- 1980-84 England (21)
- 1980 and 1983 British and Irish Lions (2)

### Coaching

- 1990-94 Henley
- 1994-97 London Irish
- 1994-97 England U21
- 1997 Bath
- 1997-2004 England
- 2005 British and Irish Lions

## Coaching Achievements

- 1<sup>st</sup> FT England coach
  - 3 x 5/6 Nations Championship winners
  - 2003 Rugby World Cup Winners
  - P83 W59 D2 L22 (71% win record)
  - £250,000 salary
- Rugby Hall of Fame 2003  
UK Coach of Year 2003  
OBE 2003; Knighted 2004
- 1<sup>st</sup> English specialist coach of Lions
  - Very public failure
  - *Hero to Zero* (Sunday Times, 2005)

## Early Influences

- RAF pilot father disapproved of ambitions to play professional association football.
  - Sent to HMS Conway Naval (rugby) School, Anglesey.
- Left first playing club Harlequins, to go to Loughborough (Sports Science BSc → PGCE in PE).
- Combined Xerox sales manager and amateur rugby playing careers.
- England played safety first conservative rugby.
  - Woodward favoured more expansive game
  - Style and ambition yielded great tries *and* embarrassing errors.

## Australia

- 1985 - transferred to Australia Xerox office.
- Continued to play rugby, for Manley (trained once with Wallabies).
- Learned about Australian rugby and sport (considered more advanced).
- Came to believe (with right preparation) Southern Hemisphere teams not invincible.

## Rugby Coaching

- Returned to UK 1990 to start own company. Became coach of lowly Henley.
  - Successful briefly at London Irish - unable to handle club politics, forced out.
  - Became asst at Bath under Robinson, then England coach, in 1997.
- Task of transforming England side from amateur into professional era.
  - *"Judge me on World Cup."* (1999) - job questioned when beaten by S Africa.
  - Team developed. Won Grand Slam followed by WC in 2003, beating champs Australia in final.
- Post WC, England came 3rd in 2004 Six Nations.
  - Last tour as England coach shortly afterwards. Beaten by NZ in two tests, without scoring single try (36-3, 36-12). Then beaten in Australia (51-15).
- After retirement of key players, again struggled to cope with politics, particularly Prem clubs' relations with England. Quit Sept 2004.
- Humiliating 3-0 series loss, as Head Coach of 2005 Lions tour to NZ.
  - Criticised by many for selections and organisation.

## Football Coaching

- Stated intention to take FAL2 badge after 2005 Lions tour.
  - *"I'm interested in football. I intend to do the awards but I may end up coaching Maidenhead U-9's. You have to start at the bottom and I intend to do that."*
- But became Performance Director at Southampton.
- More politics problems. His appointee as head of sports science, left after 2 months, amid resentment from existing staff.
- Difficult relationship with Redknapp.
  - *"There has been a lot said in the press implying I would be taking over the team but that is not my role."*
- Suggested as possible candidate for manager's position on Redknapp's departure.
- Subsequently appointed Director of Football to work alongside new manager.
- Aug 2006 Southampton confirmed Woodward had left.

## British Olympic Association

- Sept 2006, first Director of Elite Performance. £300,000 per annum.
  - Role similar to RFU Director of Elite Rugby, Rob Andrew was appointed to Aug 2006 (Woodward believed a candidate).
- Consultancy/motivational role.
- Deputy Chef de Mission at Beijing 2008, + Vancouver 2010 - undertaking review of practices (for London 2012 preparation).
- *"Biggest challenge in British sport, and of my life."*
  - *"I've really been blown away by some of the talent I've seen. The potential is massive. Our job is to get the best out of it. But we all have to work together to do it."*
- Again political problems – but
- seems to be overcoming them
- this time.

## Overview

- Control of Destiny
- Transformational Leadership
- Teamship
- Open to New Perspectives
- Challenge Convention
- Attention to Detail
- Winning Mindset
- Professional Distance
- Critical Considerations

## Control of Destiny

- Successful people believe they are in control of own destiny. More controllable in coaching than imagined.
- Selection always his decision, despite many others involved in training and support.
  - *"You work as a team, but somebody has to make the final call. In the end, it's yours to make."*
- Fought with RFU bureaucracy for complete autonomy and control over how he accomplished aims.
- Identified player access + PT coaches as problems out of his control to RFU.
  - *"Cannot hope to be the best in the world at anything you do unless you have full control of all facets that go into creating that success."*
- After 2000 strike realised players had strong views + not afraid to exercise power. Became less teacher-pupil.

## Control of Destiny

- Enjoyment comes first coaching philosophy
  - Promoting environment which pushes individuals every day to learn and grow. Encourages buy-in.
- Challenged by cutting edge innovations
  - Experiences and experts to stretch players + inject variety
  - Persuading athletes to embrace change, not fear it
- Emphasis on development/progress
  - Sharpening world class skills
  - Strengthening commitment
  - Doing things better than anybody else (on and off field)
  - Deliberately having team experience control under pressure (e.g. Marines training camp)

## Control of Destiny

- With passion nothing is impossible
  - *"You will never excel, unless you do what you want to do, rather than what you feel you ought to do. You've got to really want to do that job, if you're serious about being the best."*
- Achievement junkie
  - Elevated levels of expectation
- There is no 9 to 5!
  - *"I don't believe in work-life balance. If you want to be the best in the world..."*
- Fuelled by negative experience at boarding school
  - *"School was such a crappy part of my life that it was pretty influential in how I turned out – "you can't do that", sets off a reaction in me."*
  - Independence a key trait for not being afraid to be different.

## Transformational Leadership

- Consistent ingredients for creating high performance teams – change management and process management.
- Stealth leadership. Encourages group to gradually buy in to vision by persuading it will work (Kervin, 2005).
  - By own admission not coach to barge in/change everything at once.
    - Gradual transformation at Henley – phased in changes in culture, playing style, attitudes. Got best out of, and improved, reasonably skilful players.
- Worked hard over 7 yrs to transform England.
  - Early years like trying to ski uphill (Dallaglio, 2007).
  - But revolutionised way England prepared. Meticulous planning/organisation
  - *"From day one, the team changed, the way we trained changed – suddenly everything was different. He didn't want to do anything in the same way it had been done before...desperate to get rid of the staid forward-dominated English rugby of the early nineties... "never use the words 'game plan' – just go out and play it as it comes. Give everything a go." It was very naive, but very refreshing."* (Martin Johnson, quoted in Kervin, p.194)
  - 'Just play' style influenced by Kirton, Greenwood, and White.

## Transformational Leadership

- Good leadership transferable
  - *"Principles found in England story can be applied to any sport or business."*
  - *"My business background has enriched my ability as a sports coach."*
- Rugby as home to best practice business methods
  - *Winning* a business bestseller
- Believes professional coach could coach any sport
- Versatility of good management
  - Not great technical knowledge that makes a great coach, but ability to lead
  - About managing whole process to promote performance
  - Recognising need to gain respect
- Creating elite environment
  - Determined by needs and wants of players (customer focus?).
  - More ambitious vision. Knew what was needed to make England consistently competitive at top level. Tried to change structure of game, but approach ended in political battles with clubs + RFU. Settled for changing environment around national team instead (Dallaglio, 2007).
    - Changing rooms example.

## Transformational Leadership

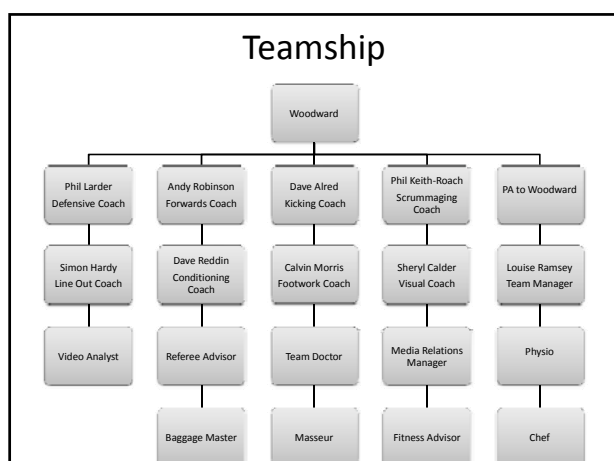
- Talent is not enough – how you harness it
- Developing thinking players with knowledge of sport
  - Really need to know subject. Should make notes/revise.
  - Could they do a degree in this sport?
- Process of enlightenment and empowerment (Lee et al., 2009)
  - Encouraged to ask questions about own practice - think rather than just do
  - *"They're the ones on the pitch and you can't do the thinking for them."*
- Media training for improved communication skills
  - Encouraged to stand up in front of peers and present info
- Athlete as coach?
  - *"If the athlete is serious about winning and performing, their technical knowledge has got to be as good as yours."*
  - *"Until a player coaches others, can he really appreciate coaching effectiveness?"*

## Transformational Leadership



## Teamship

- Team effectiveness workshop for interdisciplinary support staff.
  - 1) What we are trying to achieve?
  - 2) Communication ground rules
  - 3) Group discussion about role descriptions
  - 4) Visioning all aspects of player experience
- 10 of 13 at meeting PT. Workforce over which little control.
  - *"If serious about being best in world we couldn't possibly build elite squad with part-timers."*
- 24 hour plane test
  - Need right people around you
  - Not merely recruiting technical staff based on CV
  - Bringing together special and compatible group of players, coaches, management.
  - Longed to work with others who had same enthusiasm to succeed + sense of perfectionism (Kervin, 2005).
  - Team England



- ### Teamship
- Black Book of Teamship Rules
    - Commonly understood benchmarks of behaviour
    - Allowing team to set own standards
  - Encourage ownership
    - “Is there anything you would like to see included, amended or improved? Your input is vital – it is your document, your team, your success.” (Last page)
    - 240 Teamship Rules by 2003 WC!
  - Ability to work together
    - Collective responsibility/Team ethic
    - *This is not acceptable. You’ve let everyone down*
  - Openness to enable:
    - Commitment to agreed performance standards
    - Team members to thrash out issues/raise ideas

- ### Open to New Perspectives
- Had management consultant examine England rugby team in same way he would small business.
  - Idea of Head Coach delegating to specialist coaches from Denver Broncos visit.
  - Influenced by sharing of best practice across sports at AIS.
  - Motivation to learn inspired by Loughborough experience.
    - Fellow student, Lord Coe observed his *obsession with detail*.
  - Plenty of great ideas and a few slightly barmy (Kervin, 2005).
    - Shinar’s software to assess ability to perform under pressure and stress
  - Thought rugby players could learn from other athletes.
    - Brought Redgrave to training session as inspirational model.
    - Influenced and inspired himself by Coe at Lboro

- ### Open to New Perspectives
- Use everybody’s creativity to facilitate progress
    - “Perfectly legitimate to be asking players their opinions.”
    - Neglect grass roots – may miss catalytic ideas
  - Champions meetings
    - Use of boardroom as well as pitch
      - ‘What if’ problem scenarios. Thinking correctly under pressure (TCUP)
    - More people sitting and discussing the better
    - Get everyone within organisation in thought process
      - Most of best ideas came from the team
      - A lot can come from team if you create this culture
  - Seeking fresh perspective of the outsider
    - Tradition breeds complacency

- ### Challenge Convention
- Those from other fields unblinkered by cultural convention
    - “We wanted to question everything we did.”
    - Should we really still do it this way?
      - Training on Twickenham pitch? ‘England have never done that!’
  - Challenge orthodox thinking in sport
    - Critically consider baggage
    - Change thinking
      - Achieved only through exploration of ideas and appropriate people management
  - Throw rule book out
    - Need for lateral thinking/innovation
      - “His hallmark was his inexhaustible search for that step ahead.” Wilkinson
      - Challenging coaches and players to **think differently**
        - Changing rocks into sponges

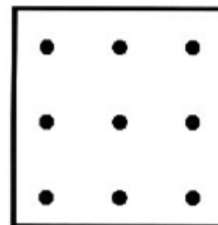
### How Many f’s?

Finished files are the result of many years of scientific study combined with the experience of many years.

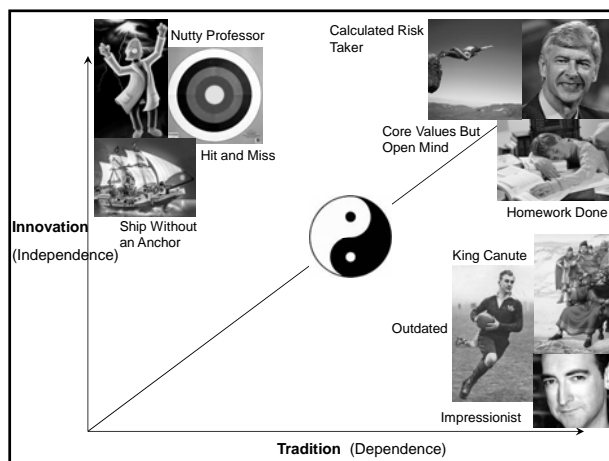
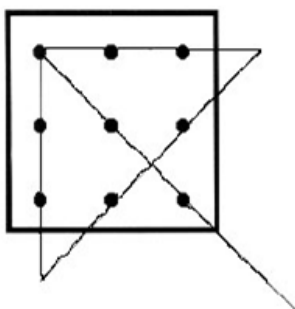
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Use 4 straight lines to connect all 9 dots – without lifting your pencil or retracing any lines.



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## Attention to Detail

- Tiny fractions gain an edge
  - Critical non-essentials
  - Poincare's Principle
    - Little things can make a huge difference
- The 1%'s
  - Differentiate best from rest
  - 8 rugby teams of roughly same standard can win RWC
    - Winner likely to be team most focused on diligently finding edge
- Developed figure hugging shirts with Nike
  - More difficult for opponents to grab hold of. Side benefit?
  - Changing shirts at half time. Benefits?
- Referee recruited to staff - advised players how to avoid conceding unnecessary penalties

## Attention to Detail

- Winning Behaviours - Key performance indicators
  - World class basics (McGeechan, 2009)
- Video analysis to understand why things happened.
  - Ask right questions, challenge players to think about decisions
  - *“Best debrief sessions should be led by the players.”*
    - Let them talk, join if needed to facilitate analysis
- Cannot do enough thinking in advance of a situation
  - Players need ability to pre-think situations – powerful learning process
    - *“We had considered possibility of extra time in WC Final.”*

## Winning Mindset

- Unshakeable self belief as unchanging character trait
- Ability to persuade others your beliefs are correct
  - Made England players believe his vision they could be greatest team in world (first step in actualisation), and convinced that if they followed him, would lead to glory (Kervin, 2005).
- Needed to be completely focused, plus time with players.
  - *"It took us 2 years to build the culture... we sustained it for a further 5. But to continue to build you need to continue to be innovative and radical."*
- Not afraid to fail, take risks, upset people, or make himself look ridiculous in pursuit of victory
  - Stayed true to beliefs, even under greatest criticism.
- Never believed failures made *him* a failure (Kervin, 2005).
  - Nothing wrong with losing as long as you know you have done everything possible to win
  - Thin line between self-belief and self-delusion?

## Winning Mindset

- Recruitment is key
  - *"There isn't a need to motivate players as the correct players will motivate themselves."*
- Remove energy sappers
  - Wrong minded people can demotivate team
  - Remove before entire working atmosphere tainted irreparably
  - Suicidal dentist!
- Uncompromising views (once mind made up)
  - *"I won't do things unless I have confidence in them and I have considered the options. Once I am satisfied that the benefits outweigh the risks, I'll go for it, even if it is against all current wisdom and practice."*
  - *"You can have the best ideas in the world but unless you can execute them, they will go to waste."*
- RFU lapsed into compromise after WC → resignation

## Winning Mindset

- Progress from setbacks
  - Downplay defeats
  - Do not let ST loss of form, derail carefully constructed LT strategy
  - Success not a straight line thing. Dislocated expectations.
  - Imp not to over-react - concentrate on sources of past success
- Build on success
  - Time for critical reflection is after success rather than failure.
  - Focus on positives
  - Work twice as hard when successful
  - Not just adverse events that can poison positive atmosphere
- **Focusing on root cause of success just as important as learning from failure**

## Professional Distance

- Empathise but do not compromise
  - Relationship with players as delicate balancing act
- To manage properly, need to know what makes them tick
  - Understand where athlete is coming from
  - Better chance of recognising outside factors affecting mentality
- Enjoy being part of team where people genuinely care
  - But need to know where to draw the line
- Maintain appropriate distance
  - Business-like relationship
  - Understand your team but don't get too close
- Ruthless
  - Single minded vision
  - Benevolent dictator?

## Critical Considerations

- Not difficult to make cultural changes as first FT England rugby coach?
- First to manage England team to major trophy since 1966.
  - But how comparable is rugby WC against football WC?
- Over rated?
- Is good leadership really transferable?
  - Ignores vital importance of context
    - Ideas too complex/style too disciplinarian for football?
  - Assumes more technically able sports specific coaches willing to be subordinate
- Lacks personal touch?
  - *"Clive admitted he was not too comfortable speaking to the players. He was always splendidly efficient and clever, but perhaps not as emotional as some of us."* (McGeechan, 2009)

## Critical Considerations

- Does not cope well with politics
  - Overdose of independence?
- Over anxious?
  - Dropped Wilkinson in 99WC after bad dream?
  - England changing searched for hidden listening devices at 03WC.
  - Convinced All Blacks had tapped into line out signals, changed them week before first Lions Test.
- Innovative, but not an innovator!
  - Still innovative? More hits or more misses?
- *"I feel I've got one big coaching job left in me - after 2012."*
  - In what context might it be?
  - Still got credibility/finger on coaching pulse?

## Conclusion

- Right person, right time, right place – perfect for move from amateurism to professionalism.
  - 03WC one of greatest triumphs in history of English sport
  - England record of 2000-03 may never be equalled
- But great coach?
  - Did change the game (1990-2003)!
  - But no sustained success since
- Coach or manager?
  - “Higher up you go, the role has a lot more organisational components to it in addition to the real coaching.”
  - “My time at Henley and London Irish was what I’d call real coaching.”
- Woodward’s take on most important coaching qualities (Cain, 2004)
  - “You’ve got to be a good communicator, but not necessarily an orator. The best coaches are good teachers with a gift for speaking clearly.”
  - “Biggest thing is to get everyone’s noses pointing in same direction; to get players, coaches and support staff all focused on winning.”

## Conclusion

- Woodward’s story may provide generic guidelines for building high performance sports teams (Jenkins, 2007)
  - *but* only to the extent that we accept transferability, and continue to innovative.
    - “The hardest part of the job is keeping momentum going. You have to keep ideas fresh, and keep moving forward in all areas, technical, medical conditioning and IT, to stay ahead.”
- Right person, right place, right time again for 2012?
  - Biggest improvement in British sport is sharing of knowledge and best ideas.
  - Understanding of importance of the coach in facilitating achievement.
    - “The real way of supporting the athlete is through the coach.”

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## Reading

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**“If you end up winning and being successful, that is hugely, hugely satisfying. I wouldn’t put a price on it. It’s just a brilliant thing to be involved in.”**