



Change – VAR ... why are even the most long awaited innovations hard to embed ... even with the Hand of God?

Part 4 of 7

Client - Clarify - Create - **Change** - Confirm - Continue - Close

VAR experiment in a no-win situation — complained about when it is used AND if not available



32 years on from the 'Hand of God' incident at the 1986 World Cup Finals, Video Assisted Refereeing (VAR) is just being trialled in professional football and yet the pundits are still complaining?

Why is it that an innovation demanded for so long has received such a poor reception on the terraces and in the media alike? My thought is perhaps this phenomenon is just a symptom of change that we are all too familiar with in business?

As we know change is a tricky thing, especially when existing routines or beliefs are entrenched in the culture of an organisation. So, what is the culture of English Premier League and World Cup football that VAR is stepping into?

As a child of the 60's, born in the very year that England last won the World Cup, I guess like many I still bear the scars of disappointment over the years. As a young man perhaps the expectations of youth combined with tales from my older relations of the glories of 1966 just rubbed salt into the wounds of serial England failures at major competitions.

Mexico 1970 was somewhat lost on me, saved emotional distress by the combination of international time zones and 'early baths' before bedtime at the age of 4.

Germany 1974 was my first experience of England agony. I recall staying up late one Wednesday evening, PJs and dressing gown on, watching England play Poland at Wembley to qualify for the finals in Germany the following year. It was supposed to be a foregone conclusion but no one had told the Poles that. So, the summer of 1974 we had to watch on as West Germany, as they were then, lifted the World Cup. What pain to miss a whole World Cup Tournament and then to see our historic enemies lift 'our cup'. I am not sure but it may have been at this point at the tender age of 8 I heard 'two world wars and one world cup' sung for the first time in the playground, such enlightened times!

A consecutive failure in 1978 to reach the finals, this time in Argentina, to again watch the hosts dazzle us with a spectacular 3-1 victory over the Netherlands was another deep scar. Plus the necessity to call upon my Scottish ancestry to cheer on 'Allie's Army', only to suffer further disappointment. I don't think many of us at school had even heard of The Falklands at that point, we were too busy studying 'ox bow' lakes and 'tectonic plates' in geography. But perhaps this emotional pain poured additional fuel onto the fire of patriotism of the Falklands War?

So in 1982, at last we qualified for the finals in Spain. And it started so well, the sun was shining, the time zone conducive to watching every match live and Bryan 'Captain Marvel' Robson scored after only 27 seconds of the first match against France. What joy, what rapture ... what could possibly go wrong?

England 1986 World Cup Final Squad



England topped their group with a 100% record, only to crash out before the semi-finals without scoring a further goal. Not even Keegan or Brooking, brought on for the last 20 minutes of the final game against the hosts Spain, could turn things around.

Which brings us full circle, back to Mexico in 1986 and the 'Hand of God' ... I could fast forward to 2010 and talk about Frank Lampard's disallowed goal against Germany, but I think you get the point by now!

So, with such a history of disappointment and injustice, much of which could have been avoided with the benefit of video evidence, why are the current VAR trials being met with such animosity?

The architecture of the VAR system works, with 'mission control' able to review situations on the pitch and feedback to the referee through his ear piece or from pitch-side video monitors.

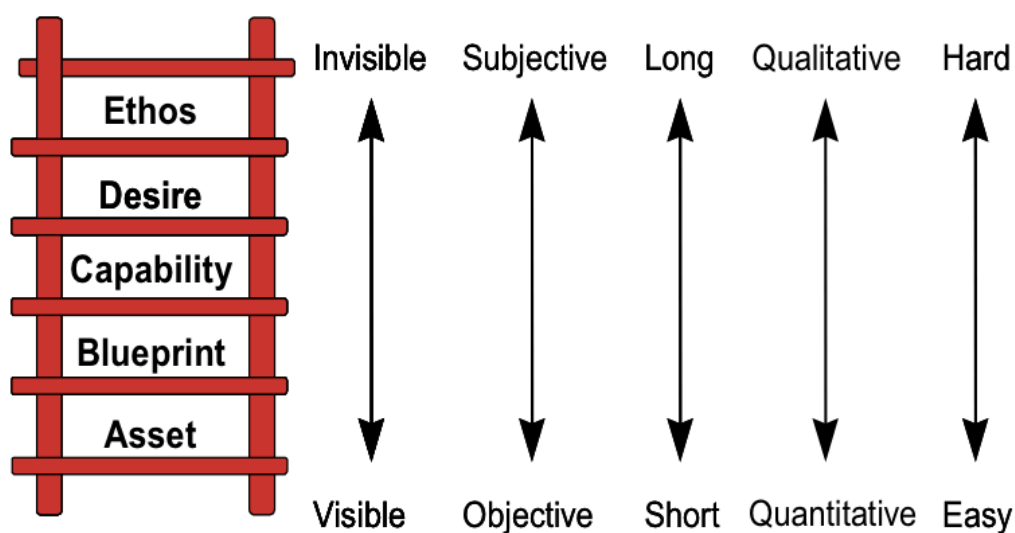
The plan is in place with a structure around the situations that can and should be reviewed during a match.

The match officials have been trained in the use of the new technology.

Admittedly it is a bit 'clunky' as any new process is, but that is to be expected under the pressures of the Premier League surely?

In the 7Cs we refer to these elements as the A B C of Change ... the Assets, Blueprint and Capability.

The A B C D E of Change



© Mike Cope

These are the relatively simple, quantitative, tangible aspects of change. The aspects that are rarely the root of failure for any change programme, typically because organisations put the most time and effort applied to them. Project management is a huge industry that is great at implementing new computer systems, rolling out new ways of working and training plans.

The things that typically de-rail change programmes are the 'soft' bits. The D and E of change ... Desire and Ethos.

How many times have we heard ' ... it is the new system that doesn't work ...' or ' ... the person that designed this process has clearly never worked in our business ...'. Both of which of course may be true, but if the D and E had more focus perhaps such teething issues would be smoothed over rather than becoming stumbling blocks.

With 'buy in' from all stakeholders who genuinely desire the change and believe it is the right thing to do even the most 'clunky' of changes can be successfully implemented.

So how can you check the D and E have been addressed? Well it can be hard to do the 'soft' things so it will require a little practice and effort:

Listen to the language ... for the 'I/we need to' versus the 'it doesn't' talk.

Observe what people actually do when they don't think they are in the spotlight.

What watch people do under pressure and listen to what people say in private.

Check-out senior manager proclamations and listen-out for genuine pride of association with staff members.

What will they defend faced with criticism of the goal and listen for the emotional language.

For VAR we can only see the external signals but for sure the voices of doubt demonstrate a lack of buy-in for the media and supporters so far. Okay some of this may be justified from the 'clunky' implementation. But for the sake of future generations of England supporters we can only hope these issues can be worked through and the pundits can return to talking about the 'beautiful game' rather than refereeing decisions and how 'we were robbed'!

And for organisations to think more seriously about the 'soft' things that are often the hard things required to embed successful change.

For more details of the A B C D E of change and the 7Cs Coaching framework visit www.7Cs.co.uk.

Part 4 of 7

Client - Clarify - Create - Change - Confirm - Continue - Close

(All credits for 7Cs framework to Mick Cope)

Duncan Johnston
Lead Consultant
7Cs ACTION

Tel: 07774 746959
E-mail: Duncan@7Cs.co.uk