

AND FINALLY...

Phil Hammond gives his take on England's recent World Cup failure

Learning from failure

What can we learn from England's latest footballing failure? Let's pretend Fabio was leading a crack surgical team in a race to perform the world's first brain transplant. It might be stretching it to imagine John Terry holding a scalpel, at least in a surgical context, but bear with me. If ever a man had a football brain it's John Terry (and we all know what sort of a brain a football has!). Anyway, by the time the England team has got the patient on the trolley, the Germans have already performed two brain transplants and are pushing for a third. Where did it all go so wrong?

Let's start with the theatre manager. I have enormous respect for Fabio Capello, at least I would do if I could understand him. Even when he's speaking through an interpreter, I struggle to make sense of him, so what 22 overpaid numpties make of it all is anybody's guess. The more people fail to understand him, the angrier he gets, like Postman Pat's psychotic Italian half-brother. You don't want to upset him for fear of finding a horse's head in your bed, but you can't help yourself because you don't know what he wants.

Spanish TV rather unkindly hired someone to translate what Fabio shouts

pitch-side, and aside from a lot of earthy abuse, there was an almost forlorn repetition of "Wayne? Wayne? Wayne?" And much of the dugout discussion between Fabio and Stuart 'Psycho' Pearce was an argument about who should stand up and shout first.

If Fabio was in charge of an operating theatre, there'd be carnage. We know that good communication is crucial to performance and, after the disastrous case of German doctor Daniel Ubani – who killed a pensioner with an overdose of analgesia after confusing the drug names – there have been calls to ensure overseas doctors have a proper command of English before being allowed to work in the UK. But while the law currently prevents us enforcing language tests on European employees, they are compulsory for doctors and nurses from Australia and America where English is the first language.

Fabio can't be entirely blamed for his team defending like the Keystone Kops on gripe water. And, granted, we saw off the mighty Slovenia, a nation that boasts more brown bears than professional footballers. But it was the surgical equivalent of a routine hernia repair in preparation for the biggest and most complex operation ever. Germans succeed in football because they work as

a team, and the same is true of surgery. In a good surgical team there is no hierarchy. Everyone knows what they're doing, anyone can raise a concern and checklists are used to ensure absolutely no stone is left unturned (or swab undiscovered). England operated like a team of prima donna locums who've hardly met, didn't know what they were supposed to be doing and didn't much care because they earn a much better living over the road at the BUPA Premier League hospital.

You could tell all was not well with England when John Terry tried to blow the whistle on team disharmony. I'm not sure whether the Public Interest Disclosure Act covers professional footballers, but it soon emerged that Terry hadn't exhausted all the correct internal channels before taking his concerns to the media. Fabio's door may always have been open, but the last time Terry knocked on it he was sacked for copping off with his registrar's girlfriend, so you can understand his preference for public revenge.

Dysfunctional teams never deliver. Life is complex and to err is human, but if we don't learn from our errors we keep repeating them. It requires difficult conversations between skilled communicators to get out of a really big hole, and Fabio's English simply wasn't up to the task. The FA has given him extra time to learn, but I wouldn't let him anywhere near my brain. **PT**

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