

The Core Disciplines:

Andrew Strauss *secures
commitment* to lead English
Cricket out of chaos

*Dean Taylor describes how the
England Cricket Board's newest
Director applied LeaderSpace's
Three Core Disciplines to turn the
tide of English cricket.*



When I started to write this blog, the opening line was going to be “English cricket is in turmoil.” At that stage it was, again. A side that had topped the World Test Cricket rankings as recently as 2012, won the World T20 championship in 2010, and won three successive series against arch-rivals Australia, was once again embroiled in debate, controversy and poor performance, culminating in the humiliation of exiting the ICC World Cup at the Group Stages following defeat to Bangladesh. As a result, many of those in leadership positions in the England set-up, including the Chairman and the coach, left their roles.

At the same time, former England player Kevin Pietersen led a fully-committed campaign to win back his place in the side. Undoubtedly one of the most talented batsmen of his era, he is also unquestionably divisive: in the media, amongst England supporters, and in his own dressing rooms. He had been told he would never play for England again. However, facing a clamour to consider including him again, the newly appointed chairman Colin Graves had suggested there might be a way back. Again, opinions were massively divided.

Against this backdrop, Andrew Strauss was appointed Director of Cricket at the England Cricket Board (ECB). A former England captain during their recent successful era, he had played with Pietersen and also fallen out with him, most notably when Pietersen sent text messages about Strauss to the opposition team during a match.

As Director of Cricket, Strauss’s role is to prepare English cricket for the World Cup in four years’ time. He is there to set strategy and build the capability of the side to compete in 2019 in a way it was unable to in 2015.

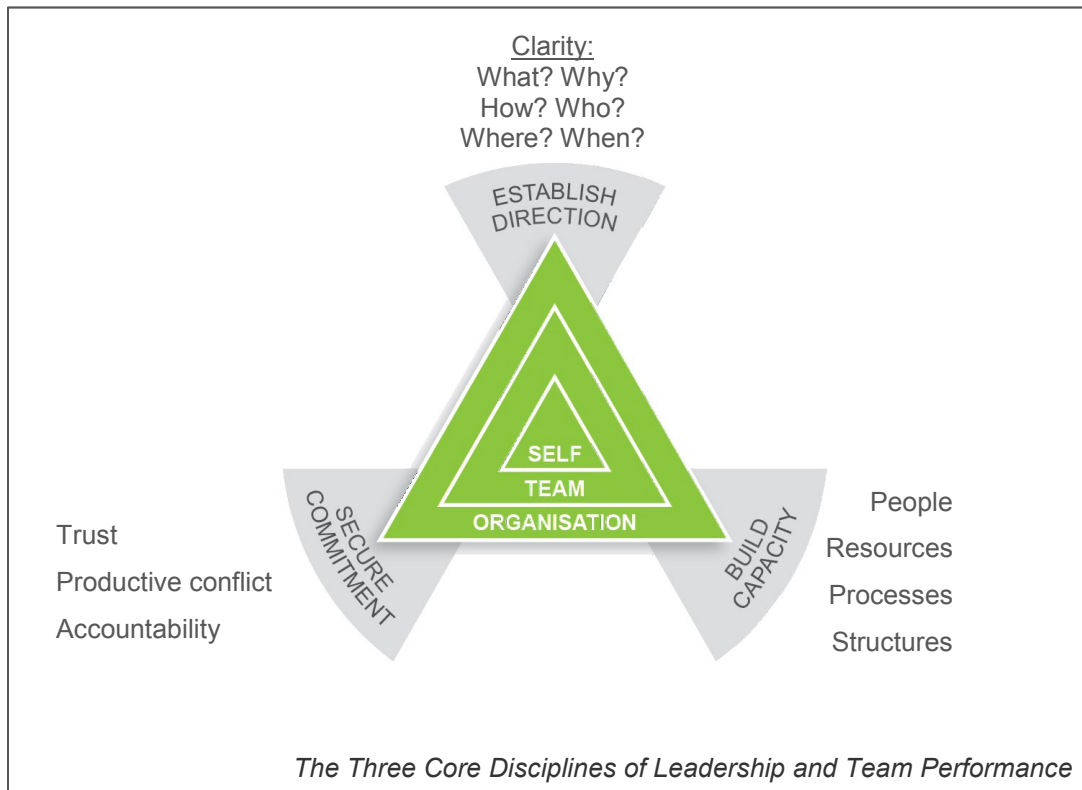
In the context of the Three Core Disciplines of Leadership and Team Performance (see below), his role is very much focusing on *Establishing Direction* and *Building Capability*.

It was interesting to note that Strauss first focused on *Securing Commitment* by making his first decision: regarding star-batsman Kevin Pietersen’s future role in the team. Strauss met with Pietersen on 11th May, at a time when the latter was compiling a score of 350. Many expected this to be a confirmation that Pietersen had met ECB Chairman Colin Graves’s requirements and would find the way open to an England return. Instead, over the course of a 40 minute one-to-one meeting, Strauss made it clear that Pietersen would form no part of England’s immediate or future plans.



The very next day, Andrew Strauss was interviewed by the BBC’s Jonathan Agnew and explained his decision¹. It was this interview that led me to write this blog: as I listened to Strauss outline his actions, intentions, and reasons, it struck me how much his reasons for taking this step focused on the three key

contributors to Securing Commitment: *Trust*, *Productive Conflict* and *Accountability* (see below). The latter he achieved by taking responsibility for resolving the situation and providing clarity regarding the team's desired Direction.



Listening to Strauss's interview, I heard him identifying and tackling the core issue of **Trust** which, when absent, sows the seeds for a dysfunctional team:

"Over the months and years, **trust** had been eroded between Kevin Pietersen and the ECB"

"While there is no trust, he can't feature in our long-term plans..."

"I honestly believe that no team can function without trust. If you don't trust the intentions of people you're working with, it's impossible to function."

Strauss also demonstrated, through his decision and explanation, that he was prepared to take resolve a conflict that others had skirted around for a long time:

"People have been running away from {the Kevin Pietersen situation} for years."

"Of course he wasn't happy about it...we've got to do what's in the best interests of English cricket."

He also resisted the leader's temptation (as outlined in Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Temptations of a CEO*) of choosing popularity over accountability, an accusation that could be made against Colin Graves. Rather than court popularity with Pietersen and a wide range of influential media pundits supporting his reinstatement to the team, Strauss took accountability for resolving the issue and then explaining his actions. If you listen to

the comments following the interview (especially from Michael Vaughan, another former captain from the successful era), it's clear that Strauss did not take either the popular or easy option.

Also, in a situation where no one can ever be sure of whether this was the right decision or not, he chose clarity over a common leadership temptation to try to achieve certainty:

“What we try to do is **provide as much clarity as possible** on the situation.”

“None of us can be completely {certain} about what's going to happen in the future. **All I can do is be as clear as possible about our present plans.**”

By the end of that interview I felt impressed by a leader who showed clarity and determination to focus on what he considered to be the best course of action for the team. He showed that he was taking responsibility for resolving a very difficult situation, and had identified the essential element which he needs to build in his team: trust. Trust which is even more important than once-in-a-generation individual talent. Certainly, Strauss's role will require him to focus on Establishing Direction and Building Capability for future tournaments, but it is both telling and reassuring that he had also recognised that he needed to Secure Commitment at an early stage.

When I started writing this blog, English cricket was in turmoil. And yet, just two weeks after Strauss's decision, England completed a remarkable victory over one of the world's most exciting teams. A disastrous first hour to the match meant that the team needed to pull together and show resilience. Then, over the next four and half days, each member of the team played a role in turning it around. In his post-match comments, victorious captain Alastair Cook particularly (and perhaps, pointedly) focused on the team spirit and collective effort that had pulled them through. Strauss had secured commitment, which produced tangible and almost instantaneous results.

[Contact LeaderSpace](#) to discuss how the Three Core Disciplines apply to your team and organisation or discuss cricket (or football) with Dean. You can also read reviews and download sample chapters of Richard Boston's book 'ARC Leadership' at www.leader-space.com.

ⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05whtps>, interview begins at 6:27