

Research Administration in Japan

A Giant Step toward Successful Administration:

**What We Can Learn from Japan's Astonishing
Victories in the Rugby World Cup 2015**

By Tadashi Sugihara



Summary

Let me start with a totally non-administrative question: Do you know much about rugby? Recently, Japan took part in the Rugby World Cup 2015 and scored a historic victory over South Africa. It seems to me that Japanese university research administration offices and Japan's national rugby team have something in common: they have both attracted attention, and they each have to deal with considerable competition—in the form of other established administrative offices inside the same university or other kinds of sports in Japan. In this article, I will describe lessons we can learn from Japan's national rugby team and how we can apply them to make a big impact on university research administration.

Japan's Defeat of South Africa Was the Biggest Upset of Rugby World Cup 2015

Even those with little interest in rugby may have heard the Cinderella story of what happened at England's Brighton Community Stadium on September 19, 2015. On that day Japan beat South Africa—one of the world's elite rugby powers—in the Rugby World Cup. After the victory, Eddie Jones, the Australian who was head coach of Japan's national team, appeared repeatedly in interviews on Japanese television. Through those repeated interviews, I picked up several points about how he built up Japan's rugby team—nicknamed the “Brave Blossoms”—after 2012, when he became head coach. Several points struck me during the interviews; and I would like to mention those points in making proposals for how research administration can be improved. I will also indicate some efforts to improve research administration that have been tried at our office.

“Crouch!” Change Your Mindset

Before the game with South Africa, I had honestly never imagined that Japan would achieve any better than a draw. I remembered how Japan was beaten by New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup in 1995 to the tune of 17 to 145. Yes, 145! So, I thought Japan had zero chance of beating powerhouse South Africa in 2015.

According to Jones, some of the players on the Japanese team felt the same way. Because Japanese tend to be smaller and physically weaker than South Africans, it seemed most people could not envision them winning the scrums. Jones, however, felt that such thinking represented a misconception. Accordingly, he did not accept any excuses for not winning; he changed the players' mindsets and demanded that, above all, the Brave Blossoms work hard.

Jones got the Brave Blossoms to begin their training at 5 a.m., which he referred to as a “head start”: this involved starting very early in

the morning—before anybody else—and putting in a great deal of intense training. Through this training, Jones was able to build confidence in the players' minds and make them believe they could win games.

Changing our mindset is important in our daily lives when we need to tackle a major problem we have never before faced. We tend to be too easily dissuaded from coming up with good solutions. Usually this is because there is no precedent for the problem. Instead, we should be first confident in ourselves, then try to consider the situation from multiple viewpoints and then make another effort to solve the problem.

“Bind!” Know Your Strength

After their training, the Brave Blossoms no longer lacked confidence. They felt physically stronger than before. I would guess, at this point, they realized they could use their existing skills, for example, in passing the ball, together with the increased physical and mental stamina they had acquired. Against South Africa, the Brave Blossoms could play full throttle until the very end.

When we change our mindset, we can view ourselves from the outside. We are then able to clearly understand the skills we already possess. Of course, it is also important to acquire new skills but, having changed our mindset, we can use the skills that we already have more efficiently than we could have imagined before. We should ask ourselves where our strengths lie—just as the Brave Blossoms were able to use the excellent skills they already possessed to their maximum advantage.

Team performance is always a concern for university administration. To achieve something great, each staff member needs to know his or her strengths and work hard, and then think how these strengths could be used to improve individual performance. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. The whole is not the sum, but

the product of the strengths of each team member multiplied together.

Having become physically stronger through hard training, the Brave Blossoms were able to scrummage low. To achieve this, all the players have to bind tightly together and push forward cohesively. When a scrum is formed this way, it is more stable and powerful.

“Set!” Be Bold

The Brave Blossoms developed an original style: possessing the ball and moving forward, being tackled, forming a ruck, and then passing. They

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repeated this process over and over again not to give a rest to an opponent. You can see this tactic when they scored the winning try to beat South Africa. This form of continuous attack was a new tactic that Japan had never applied before. They controlled the game using creative ideas based on their long, hard efforts and superb skills. They won games by challenging themselves and taking risks.

When faced with the chance to achieve something great, we have to be brave enough to gamble on that chance. Few people may be able to initially understand creative ideas. The



Discussion before the talk about serendipity. L-R: Dr. Shigekazu Sawaizumi, Director of Society for Advancement of Management, Professor Ichiro Tsuda, Hokkaido University, Asa Nakano, leader of the KIZUKI project and Taketo Tsugehara, manager of Kyoto University Research Development Program. Dr. Sawaizumi and Professor Tsuda are well known as an author of books about serendipity and his studies on chaos, respectively.

question is whether we stay strong and follow through with our new idea, or stay stuck where we are, upholding the status quo. David Kelley and Tom Kelley at IDEO, a famous design firm in Palo Alto, California, make the following statement on page 2 of Introduction in their book *Creative Confidence*: “At its core, creative confidence is about believing in your ability to create change in the world around you. It is the conviction that you can achieve what you set out to do. We think this self-assurance, this belief in your creative capacity, lies at the heart of innovation.”

Lessons Learned and a Few Examples from Kyoto

The lessons I learned from the Brave Blossoms’ World Cup performance can be summarized as follows: (1) change your mindset—always examine a situation from multiple viewpoints; (2) know your strengths—think about how you can maximize your performance through teamwork; and (3) be bold—bet on chances.

In our office, the Kyoto University Research Administration Office, there is atmosphere that allows staff to make proposals on projects that may seem very unique compared with the standard support services given to researchers, although it is sometimes difficult to persuade all the stakeholders at our university of the importance of taking such challenges. For example, we plan and manage the Kyoto University Research Development Program. After applications from researchers are reviewed and accepted, funds in this program are provided to them to start a feasibility study or outsource editing services so that English manuscripts can be submitted to international journals and have a better chance of being accepted.

For your reference, the Research Development Program funded 26 accepted applications in fiscal 2014 for feasibility studies, which amounted to about US\$204,000. Through this support, proposals were made for external grants for 21 research projects, and about \$2,878,000 for its services was obtained in this regard.

In addition to organizing such funding, the program covers other challenging activities, which involve changing the mindsets of researchers. The name used here—*KIZUKI*—is a literal translation of the Japanese word for “awareness.” As part of the KIZUKI project, a workshop called Visual Thinking Strategies <http://www.vtshome.org/> is held. One by one, participants view a painting and then share their impressions of the painting with one another. This workshop has a very simple format, but participants soon become aware of how differently each interprets the same image. They can then recognize how this phenomenon could apply, for example, to examining experimental data. How an object appears may depend totally on our beliefs with respect to that object. One of these workshops took place after a lively discussion on whether it is possible to induce serendipity—the ability to discover something new unexpectedly—which also requires that we view a situation from multiple viewpoints.

Finally, we must try to improve ourselves and share good practices with one another. NCURA offers many programs and opportunities to share information at various occasions through direct conversations or through the Internet. Let’s be bold and challenge ourselves to achieve great successes and work hard—just like the Brave Blossoms. ■



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