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“Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing”

Vince Lombardi (1959)

**A Case Study of the Winning Ethos and Organizational Culture  
of the All Blacks (1950-2010)**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Management

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Judy, my four sons, their charming wives and my nine grandchildren; the most important people in my life, who I love dearly.

It is dedicated also to Tegan and Chelsea both starting their academic careers, whose results have been inspirational for me.

## ABSTRACT

Organizational culture has been defined as, “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2010, p. 18). The winning record of the All Blacks, a 75% success ratio in test matches, is part of their organizational culture, which has been developed, nurtured and sustained since their inception in 1903. This case study evaluates the All Blacks during three distinct eras between 1950 and 2010. Primary data was obtained through the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with past and present All Black captains and coaches. A cross case analysis has been chosen because it is a method used in qualitative research to investigate different phenomena within their real contexts (Yin, 2009).

A key finding is the strong senior collective leadership that has been ever present. Originally lead by senior players informally from ‘the back seat of the bus’ this internal leadership has been formalised by the recent coaching team and has proved to be very effective. Pride in the All Blacks legacy, pride in selection and pride in winning are also constant factors in their success. Symbols, such as the jersey with the silver fern are clearly important as well as rituals like the *haka*, which has become increasingly important. The learning culture within the team has emphasised constant improvement through scientific use of exercise physiology, video analysis, nutrition, and developing effective decision making on and off the field. The importance placed on winning has remained consistent. The learning culture and learning leadership within the All Blacks instils a commitment to total honesty in self and team evaluation and reflection. It is anticipated that these findings will be transferable to other sport team contexts and assist in the organizational development of sport team culture.

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### **Other assistance**

- Photographs Peter G. Bush
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- Proof reading Ellen Martin

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS & ABBREVIATIONS

### Publications

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### Abbreviations

Boks	South Africa Springbok rugby players
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CER	Closer Economic Relations Agreement
DB	Dominion Breweries Ltd
DGSE	Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
GST	Goods and Services Tax
GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness
HART	Halt all racist tours organization
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IRB	International Rugby Board
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
MMP	Mixed Member Proportional Vote
MMPI	The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
MP	Member of Parliament
MUEC	Massey University Ethics Committee
NBA	National Basketball Association of the United States
NZRU	New Zealand Rugby Union (shortened 2006, was NZ Rugby Football Union)
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPM	Organizational Profile Model
RWC	Rugby World Cup
TV	Television
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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Richie McCaw (All Black Captain)



The Rugby World Cup