

## **Collective Leadership A Case Study of the All Blacks**

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### **Abstract**

This case study evaluates the development of a formal collective leadership approach by the All Blacks (New Zealand's national men's rugby team) management. The All Blacks have an astonishing 75% winning record in test matches over a hundred year period. This winning ethos is a part of their organizational culture, which has been developed, nurtured and sustained since the inception of the first national team in 1903. The purpose of the study is to develop a greater understanding of the organization and leadership culture that has maintained the All Blacks' winning record in a changing socio-cultural environment. In this qualitative research study, primary data is obtained through the analysis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with past and present All Black captains and coaches (over a period of 60 years from 1950-2010). Narratives stories are based on true events providing a rich description, which enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings. A key finding is the strong senior collective leadership that has been ever present. Originally led by senior players informally from 'the back seat of the bus' this internal leadership has been formalized by the most recent coaching team and has proved to be very effective with regard to maintaining a winning culture in an ever-changing organizational and socio-cultural environment. The learning culture and learning leadership demonstrated within the All Blacks collective leadership model instil a commitment to total honesty in oneself, team evaluation and reflection. It is anticipated that these findings will be transferable to other business and team sport contexts and assist in organizational development.

### **Keywords**

Collective leadership, organization, culture, team

## Introduction

The All Blacks has won 75% of their test matches in their 109 year history (All Blacks, 2010). In the period of the recent Henry, Smith, and Hansen coaching regime (2004 - 2011), the success rate has an even higher percentage of 86%. This international success rate is not even matched by Brazil's five time world champion football whose overall success rate in international matches is 62% (Harris, 2008). In their book "*Peak Performance*" Gilson, Pratt, Roberts and Weymes (2001) examine the organizational theory behind twelve successful international or professional teams in world sport.

This include the very successful professional franchises—the Chicago Bulls, the San Francisco 49ers, the Atlanta Braves and the New York Yankees, teams who all have periods of sublime success, but the success is not sustained over a lengthy period. Their success rate is what make the All Blacks worth investigating. The objective of this current study is to examine their leadership approach. The main question for this research is how the All Blacks' leadership has maintained their successful winning record in a changing socio-cultural environment.

Schein (2004, p. 22) argues that

... once cultures exist they determine the criteria for leadership... and thus determine who will or will not be leader... the dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realise that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin.

When cultures become unsuccessful or dysfunctional, leaders are invariably replaced so the organization can survive and adjust to a changing environment. One such example was the All Blacks' failure, until 2011, to win the Rugby World Cup since 1987. In all instances, except 2007, the incumbent coaches retired, resigned or were unceremoniously discarded by the governing body, the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU).

The importance of adaptation to leadership is also highlighted by Schein, as it is usually a primary concern of the formal leader/s of the group. Failure to manage and adapt to external threats and opportunities may result in the termination of a leader's job, whereas internal dissent can be forgiven. As Yukl (2010, p. 20) points out "leadership has been defined in terms of traits, behaviour, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and as occupation of an administrative position". This is an acknowledgment there are many complexities in leadership.

In an exhaustive survey of leadership definitions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rost (1993) concludes that neither scholars nor practitioners have been able to label leadership correctly when they see it happening or when they engage in it. One of the major controversies over leadership is whether it should be viewed as a specialized role or as a shared influence process (Yukl, 2008). Although leadership may manifest itself differently within various contexts, its energetic trajectory shares a common feature: collective mobilization towards an explicitly or implicitly determined purpose. In summary, leadership is a collective process, encompassing both those who would be known as 'leaders' and those who would be known as 'followers'. Over time, researchers have focused on leader-centred or follower-centred perspectives of leadership.

## Collective Leadership

Follower centred approaches to leadership emphasise a Collaborative Leadership perspective, advocated by Kanter (1983) and Chrislip and Larson (1994), who describe an emerging body of theory and management practice, focusing on the leadership skills and attributes needed to deliver results across organizational boundaries, in which critical business relationships cannot be controlled by formal systems requiring a dense web of interpersonal connections. In their book "*Collaborative Leadership*," Chrislip and Larson (1994) suggest that it shares several key ideas with other leadership theories and models, including: transformational leadership (Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977),

leadership as process (Kotter, 2001) and practices (Kouzes & Posner, 1990). Examples of Collaborative Leadership perspectives include collective or distributive leadership (Denis, Lamothe & Langley, 2001; Lemay, 2009) as systems and processes that involve multiple people working together to make the leadership happen (Marinnez-Moyano, 2006), leading laterally across boundaries or in non-authority contexts, utilizing relationships as the key aspect of producing leadership (Chirichello, 2001).

Collective leadership is still an emerging field, so there is no common definition. It is about embracing and marshalling human, cultural and technological resources in ways that enable members of a group motivated by a common purpose to build relationships with each other that are genuinely respectful enough to allow them to co-construct their shared purpose and work (Chirichello, 2001). Chirichello (2001) defines collective leadership as creating a culture in which followers become leaders and leaders know when to follow mutuality and synergy predominate over isolationism and individualism (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998). Collective leadership supports a culture in which trusting relationships are valued and members of the organization experience a sense of self-empowerment. In other words, the focus is on "we" rather than "me." The creation of collective leadership in which members play distinct but tightly-knit and complementary roles is a critical factor in achieving substantive change in many organizations. This paper examines the development of collective leadership approach in the All Blacks rugby team.

## Method

The case study method is chosen because it allows the integration and comparison of different perspectives which can give a detailed understanding of a context (Andrew, Pedersen & McEvoy, 2011; Gray, 2009). It also enhances the richness of the data (Collis & Hussey, 1997; Yin, 2009) by generating multiple perspectives and allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues of interest (Merriam, 1998). Hence, a case study

approach is suitable for examining the leadership and organisational culture of the All Blacks over a 60 year period from 1950-2010 through interviews with selected captains and coaches.

The use of qualitative data analysis in this case study is aimed to communicate understanding from the different interview responses (Bassegy, 2003; Creswell, 1994; Stake, 2008). The nature of qualitative and case study research seeks to form a unique interpretation of events rather than produce generalizations, but it is expected that the analysis of their interpretations could be related to, compared to and contrasted with other high performance groups in both business and team sports. In this case, the research spans a typology of amateur and professional eras, which incorporates other significant political, economical, socio-cultural and technological changes that impact on rugby and the All Blacks. The methodological difficulties usually associated with a longitudinal study (i.e., time consuming, complex data analysis) are offset by the fact that data derived from the interviewees was easily accessible due to the lead researcher's long term involvement in New Zealand rugby. Having been a long-serving representative rugby player and a councillor of the New Zealand Rugby Union, the lead researcher has both access to, and the trust of, the participants. Moreover, his experience as a player and administrator gives him an experiential lens to interpret the data in an empathetic yet critical manner.

The primary data was obtained through the use of 20 semi-structured, in-depth expert interviews with past and present All Black captains and coaches. The semi-structured interview is considered ideal for this type of subjective study, because it allows the probing of meanings that interviewees ascribe to certain events and allows the expansion and clarification of responses in order to understand their opinions and beliefs (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008) regarding organisational culture and leadership. The data is

analysed according to Huberman's (1994) well-established principles of qualitative data analysis. These are data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification. The credibility and dependability of the research are enhanced by triangulating the data (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2009) involving relevant documentation (reports and biographies), the data collected from the interviews of the selected experts (captains and coaches), and the lead researcher with his previous extensive experience in rugby. When applicable, reporting of the descriptive verbatim responses occur to convey the holistic and subjective understanding and meaning of the phenomena under study (Merriam, 1998).

## Results

In particular, the evolution of collective leadership amongst the All Blacks players is a key finding of this paper. Hence, verbatim responses from the interviewees (coaches and captains) that relate to the role of the captain and coach, informal leadership, and formalized systems of encouraging collective leadership will be presented.

### The Captain's Role: 'Great Man' Theory

When asked to reflect on their leadership style as All Black captains it was evident that most of the captains in the amateur era felt they were appointed because of the leadership traits they possessed and displayed. In accordance with Stogdill's (1974) 'Great Man' or 'Trait' theories these characteristics, depending on requirements of the situation, may have included intelligence, alertness to the needs of others, an understanding of the task requirements, self-confidence, initiative and persistence. In addition, however, there is an understanding that leadership comes from within the team as well as from formal leaders such as captains:

Whineray, he was a born leader... he is natural. It is easy for him, not just on the field but off the field too... he is a good orator, a good and clever guy, a very brilliant man... I think the greatest

achievement they made was making Lochore captain. It was one of the great things because I think, there were about four of us in the running to be captain of that '66 team. I think I was of more value to the team not being captain because the captain is often restricted in what he can do... leadership is within the team

Other captains also emphasise that leaders in the form of captains bring their own experiences and qualities to the role, but that respect from their fellow players is essential:

Leadership has never changed. It's a mixture of personal quality and if you are the captain, the rest of the players must have respect for you... It's a quality of personality I think as much as anything else and the ability to control when things get hairy and there aren't many people who can do that... The captain is not a domineering sort of fellow but very intelligent, pretty clear and an exceptionally good leader in that respect.

One of the All Black captains of the amateur era indicated that despite his lack of experience and training in leadership and rugby, he was selected as captain and felt his inclusive leadership style may have played a part in his selection:

It was an enormous surprise to me to be a captain over other experienced All Blacks... in the end, I grew into it... I had to really work hard initially... I think I was an inclusive captain... I liked to use the other people's skills and experience as well as my own and by doing that I probably got stronger as I went along, as a captain... I'd like to think that I had the ability to communicate well with players and because I'd gone through, a real rough patch initially... I understood how some of the younger and less experienced players were feeling when they were in the All Black environment... I made a big point of helping them and at least telling them what they had to do... nobody had ever told me what I had to do to be an All Black.

I never aspired to be a leader... I sort of had it thrown at me... I had captains who were supposedly good captains... a lot of the time their style of leadership was my style... the thing I enjoyed about the leadership role was that I like winning, and I liked things to be done well, so that gave me the opportunity to actually be in a position where I could influence what happened and what was done by other people.

These key statements from All Black captains recognise the importance of informal collective leadership to the team in the 1960s era. Veysey (1974, p. 49) sheds some further light in this informal leadership of the 1950-60s era with this comment about legendary All Black Sir Colin Meads:

The side to Meads greatness, which many perhaps do not quite appreciate, is the contribution he makes in a side's corporate welfare. Colin Meads is a humble man, a man of action rather than a talker about his actions, yet he is always the unofficial adviser, guide, assistant, leader of any All Black party outside the official leaders of the side... Meads does not seek this position, the rest of the team simply place him in it.

### **The Coach's Role: The Amateur Era**

During the 1950-60s era, coaching was very limited in terms of scientific fitness preparation, team strategy and tactical planning by comparing to the professional era (Verdon, 1999). Although somewhat autocratic and influenced by serving their country in war time, three coaches/selectors—Dick Everest, Neil McPhail and Sir Fred Allen, are recognised for their capabilities positively by the interviewees:

I can remember Dick Everest, who was an astute coach... he wasn't liked by the rest of the Rugby Union much, probably because of individuality and non-conformity and the rugby politics of the time, but he was an astute man.

When Neil McPhail took over...his information to me was pretty basic...

“make sure you get your defensive areas right - scrum defence, line out defence, back defence in terms of covering. Get those things right, 100% accurate, the rest bonus. Got it”?

Fred Allen was the dictatorial sort... wanting to spin the ball...and he convinced us that it was the way to go... he got onside with the players to get what he wanted.

The coaches and players interviewed from 1970-80s era acknowledged there was a big difference in the calibre, experience, and strategic/tactical capabilities of some of the coaches appointed, compared to the professional era when they go through an exhaustive selection process. The coaching varied from an almost laissez-faire style to successful coaches like Jack Gleeson (1977-78) and Sir Brian Lochore (1985-87) whose team won the 1987 World Cup. A successful captain of this era had no compunction in destroying the myth that all New Zealand coaching had been visionary and skilled with these comments.

We have had All Black selectors/coaches that have never taken provincial teams... they'd never coached... and come into teams that really coach themselves... the coaches just stand under the goal posts... I couldn't believe it.

The important role of the senior players is also noted

I mean we had Jack Gleeson, a very astute coach...Jack was in charge of the on-field activities, but in terms of setting standards, behaviour and expectations... there was no question at all that the senior players were in charge and that's not putting them in a negative way.

However, J.J.Stewart was acknowledged in the 1970s for his qualities particularly intelligence and people management skills that helped in the learning process.

JJ was a guy that could be coaching rugby today... he was an absolute character and factotum of knowledge... I think those good coaches had an ability to stand and

bring people together and he had this wonderful ability and great sense of humour and he brought all these guys together and he selected a whole lot of experience if you like, to support him and the players he picked.

### **Informal Leadership Group: The “Back Seat of the Bus”**

One of the rituals developed in the 1950-60s (and continued through to the professional era), at least partially because there was little or no induction for players being selected to play for the All Blacks. It was the important role of the “back seat of the bus”. This term refers to the practice of the most senior players (except the Captain) occupying the back seat of the bus that transports the team on tours and to games. The following comment from an interviewee of the 1950-60s amateur era explains this:

When we were there it was by an agreement... the right of the back seat - you had to achieve it...the captain had to sit down the front and the back seat was for the senior members of the team that were the captain's lieutenants...we had our little rules and that sort of thing.

At times there were a high level of experienced decision makers and an informal core of indirect leaders whom the captain could call on for help and support. As a result, senior players adopted the ritual of the back seat of the bus as a means of setting values and rules of behaviour for the team outside the influence of team management, as commented on by a long-term senior All Black and captain of the 1970-80s:

I thought that the stability of the internal disciplines of the side came from the back seat of the bus...it removed the captain and coach and management from the day-to-day part of the discipline of the team and the preservation of its traditions.

I thought that was a very important part of it... it did develop a very, very efficient and highly respected part of All Black rugby... I was in the back seat of the All Black bus for about 10 years.

Another captain of this era confirmed the value of the ritual from a team perspective:

I think the senior players were important in the back seat when they were responsible and did things properly...then it was a good tradition to maintain... I think that the coach and the captain don't actually run the team, the senior players do...I think the coaches and the captains have the responsibility of setting the pathway for the senior players by getting them on board and getting the planning and the whole thing going in the right direction with the help of the senior players.

Convention dictated that at some point during long tours younger members of the team would try and unseat the senior players from their positions. Such forays invariably failed and the unsuccessful parties often incurred physical injuries in addition to wounded pride as social hierarchies were maintained. Senior players earned the right to become members of the back seat of the bus not only by seniority but also by consensus or recognition of need and at times not without physical remonstration (Kirwan, 1992, Gillies, 1998). According to one long serving back seat of the bus member who became a manager in the professional era:

It was subject to some changes...because I came back years later as a manager and there was always challenges for the back seat... but when we were there it was an agreement... the right of the back seat, but you had to fight your way into it... so you had to achieve it... but when I went back as a manager it was on seniority in the team and you know they all had their rituals.

The value of the ritual, which is much more than just the right to sit in the back seat, varies according to perception and the subjective analysis of the player, but focuses on team discipline and protocols, and even tactics.

When I first got in the All Blacks and consequently I was sitting in the front and didn't actually know about the back seat... but the back seat in the form of the four guys, had a large part to play in terms of the discipline, the sort of things that we did as a team

socially and more than that in some aspects... the back seat was a very, very strong protocol when we played and has continued and it's still there today... it's exactly the same as it ever was. I never got to the back seat because I became Captain so I got shunted up the front again... I was able to be a guest in the back seat on the way home from the games, which I enjoyed.

Whilst not everybody saw significance in it as a process, it was an informal one, highly regarded by many of the players in the amateur era. Its importance is acknowledged in these views:

This was a case of setting standards and there was no question as to who was in charge and what the expectations were of you in making this team... It wasn't that you'd made it... you had a lot of work to do... it was a very, very sobering and quite daunting prospect... I probably wasn't so much aware of it until I got on the bus to go out to the airport and I got a call to come down the back of the bus and I was right up the front then, one of the new boys... [I was] asked the question "What does being in the All Blacks mean to you? I told him what I thought... he then asked, "What are you going to do to contribute to this team?" They did that with all the new boys... they went through the same routine.

The rituals of informal senior player leadership and the emphasis on winning is indelibly emphasised by the words of Sir John Kirwan (2010, p. 42), who played in the 1980-90s:

When I first made the All Blacks the older guys were pretty tough on me, as they were for all newcomers. They said, "You know, if we lose on Saturday it's your fault"... They said, "It's the man in the jersey, not the jersey" That's the whole attitude: take the responsibility first...and while that might sound particularly hard, it's actually true.

The responsibility of being an All Black is also indicated by the following coach's comment

related to his induction as a player and then as a coach:

There was "my" induction and then there was the All Black induction, where the players got their test tie and the back seat boys or the player's committee, the leadership group that we had, would spell out in no uncertain terms the responsibility that these players had just taken on... My induction was, and there were some pretty good stories around about this, about me finding out how much bottle a player had... and him finding out what he was in for... that trainings were going to be harder than a game could ever be... and about what All Blacks had to go through.

### **Formalized 'Collective Leadership': The Professional Era**

During the professional era of rugby, since 1995, the All Blacks has had a number of experienced coaches with very successful provincial backgrounds. If one looks at the coaches of this era, with their success rates in parenthesis, they include Alex Wyllie (86.2%), Laurie Mains (67.6%), John Hart (75.8%), Wayne Smith (70.5%), John Mitchell (82.1%), and Graham Henry (86%), most of whom have had very successful records in terms of their win/loss ratio (All Blacks, 2010). Both Wyllie and Hart (Thomas, 1993, 1997) were part of the successful 1987 World Cup coaching troika with Sir Brian Lochore, and Sir Graham Henry, with Wayne Smith and Steve Hansen, has now had success in 2011 (Howitt, 2012).

In the professional era (1995-present) there has been a lessening in the importance of the back seat ritual and moving toward formalizing induction processes and leadership structures. This shift focusing from an informal 'back seat of the bus' induction to a more formalized induction process reflects one of the most significant changes in the leadership culture of the All Blacks'- a paradigm shift in thinking regarding professionalism and its meaning, as this coach of the era points out:

The first thing I thought when I got appointed, because I'd done a lot of study on professionalism in the NFL, the NBA and soccer, I could see a huge void between our knowledge of

professionalism in New Zealand sport and internationally... so I actually spent a tremendous amount of my time in the early part of my tenure actually starting to prepare the players and the management team for a professional era and the expectations of it.

The recent coaches are cognizant of the importance of the informal collective leadership of All Blacks whilst at the same time being aware of some shortcomings, as this coach comments:

The 'back seat of the bus' was your leadership group in the old days... We have used that as a model but some of the traditions that grew up with that weren't positive... some of the drinking and social aspects. There were a lot of positive things that were contributive to the team... So we tried to take the model and apply it to our leadership group so selection of that group generally is done through experience... but there was merit in there as well. Most of our leadership group by default are our most experienced players because they are our best players and one of the first jobs in the leadership group is to be the best player on the field in your position, so that's pretty similar to how the back seat was established... but the other leadership model I suppose is growing from belief that people rise to a challenge if they see a challenge, and our players play a massive role in every part of All Black life so we have very few unilateral decisions made in our team... they are done collectively with an alignment between management and players and that's led by the former back seat or the leadership group.

As a result, in 2004 there was a shift from a singular to a shared model of leadership:

... at the Tri-Nations together led by BJ Lochore we threw him all our ideas and came up with a blueprint for success for the next few years... dispense with scientific management theory – the leadership model of one boss leading and the rest just being followers... we needed a group of

leaders to support the captain... it took a paradigm shift.

This change is quite dramatic and shows how developed, knowledgeable and skilled the professional coaches are becoming – they have very accurately identified a problem to be resolved as one coach points out:

Because it meant that we didn't want to do a lot of leadership training with guys and then not select them... we almost needed to pre-select the leadership group and ensure that they were in the team, almost guaranteed that they were going to be picked for the team, which was different for the All Blacks to do... we started on the end of year tour with a leadership group.

Prioritising leadership amongst selection criteria is a real paradigm shift in coaching as it changes the whole approach to coaching and leadership:

Everything we did as a team the better the alignment... the more common our framework... the better understanding we had... the more empowerment the players had... the better we played... the better the leaders led the better we played... the better they played the more we won... so I think if you looked at one thing since 2004 that has been hugely influential in the All Blacks having a 86% or 87% winning ratio... it's the leader.

So the 'proof of the pie' truly is in the eating, as these All Blacks embark on a very successful period of test match results due in no small way to the formal use of a senior leadership group. The following views of a captain of this era endorse this view:

Senior players in the team are hugely important... we have meetings where we talk about things, where if I was doing it wrong I would want them to be able to say, "Hey, this is crap," you know... there are times when you walk out of there and even if you didn't all agree you say... right this is how we are going to do things... the same with the coaches I have to be able to go and say I don't agree with how we are doing things, or I do... to be able to go



and have that discussion and then say, “Okay, make a decision” and let’s get on with it... I think that is pretty important as well... at the end of the day you have to commit to what you have decided... that’s the way I see it... a lot of that comes out of communication, just being able to talk about it.

The senior leadership group, perhaps used in slightly different ways by other All Black coaches in the past, has become a feature of the recent All Blacks. The coach that formalized induction processes and the leadership group stresses again the importance of relationships and high standards when it comes to leadership of the All Blacks:

The leadership of the team is vital... we put a lot of emphasis on that and on the alignment between the senior players and the coaches... the alignment between the captain, the vice-captain and me as coach and the alignment between the senior players and the other players... because if you’re constantly playing the same game you’re going to get beaten and passed by the opposition who are going to work you out. I think the standards generally, the leadership standards and producing high standards for the group are also critical... the social climate in the All Blacks now, is quite different from what it was eight years ago.

### **Leadership & Learning Culture**

A coach in the most recent era also explains the development of an empowering/questioning approach to assist decision making in the coach/learner process:

Modern players are a different generation that needs logic... as coaches we have had to become questioners... so instead of instructing all the time, technically or tactically, we tend to use a lot of ‘what’ questions so you get descriptive answers... “So what did you see in front of you?”... “What’s your reaction to that?”... You are getting a player to understand what he sees and understand what he does and then

you’re building up a situational awareness within the player.

This new learning, self and team analyses and critique incorporated into the collective leadership approach of the All Blacks are highlighted by the remarks of a recent coach:

As we become more aware of the need for a player centred coaching environment rather than a coach centred one of the players as well as the coach placed in a new learning environment... we try to recreate and simulate pressures of the game and try and simulate the stress that is going to happen in the game...we throw them in unpredicted events, and then throw in something else that is unpredicted and get the players to solve that problem... we give them a target... to get out of the goal line and into the opposition half and get possession back and say, “how are you going to do that? This is an experiential learning situation basically to improve their problem solving with senior players making input and players trained to be analytical. The learning situation is enhanced by the interaction among players and coaches.

### **Discussion**

#### **Collective Leadership**

The research shows that All Black coaches and captains such as Neil McPhail and Sir Wilson Whineray (Howitt, 2010), Sir Fred Allen (Verdon, 1999; Watkins & Sayers, 2011) and Sir Brian Lochore (Veysey, Caffell & Palenski, 1996), Sir Brian Lochore (now as Coach) and David Kirk, and more recently Sir Graham Henry and Richie McCaw displays traits and qualities commonly associated with leadership (Howitt, 2012). Results also suggest informal collective leadership occurred

within the All Black culture with the use of senior players (e.g. Brian Lochore's seven provincial captains in the forwards 1966-1970) and the influence they have, as well as the influence of rituals such as the 'back seat of the bus' group through the amateur era (1950-1995). Leadership theory has shifted from emphasis on the traits of 'great men' to the relationship between leaders and followers (Rost, 1993). Our research suggests that in the context of the All Blacks, character traits of the captain are expected and valued by others in the team, and act as a prerequisite for effective relationships.

The 'back seat of the bus' ritual was developed by the senior players in the team over a period of many years as a means, in the absence of a formal induction process into the team, of establishing leadership protocols, team values, disciplines, and expected behaviours. The need for such a ritual in the pre professional era highlights shortcomings in the management leadership processes and means that the team is resorted to its own forms of peer learning, mentoring and leadership processes as a means of developing social consensus to achieve the objective of winning. The more formalized collective leadership approach (Chirichello, 2001) of the recent management group maintains the principle of using key players as part of their decision making and leadership processes.

As with the most academic leadership theory it is impossible to define one style of leadership responsible for All Black success as the leadership methods follow an evolutionary path. The coaching leadership for a long time in the amateur era involved the scientific model of Fredrick Taylor (1947) of one 'boss' and a directive or authoritarian style of leadership, for example, Sir Fred Allen (Verdon, 1999; Watkins & Sayers, 2011). There was an emphasis on individual and team discipline. That is not to say there were no team plans and strategies or the delegation of some responsibilities. Whilst

this system continued in the 1970s and 80s it was interspersed with some periods of laissez-faire coaching leadership (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939) in which the collective and collaborative informal leadership of the senior players was often responsible for the success achieved.

Haden (1983, 1988) was critical of the NZRU administration during this period. He argued that the quality of leadership varied according to the capability of the coach and manager, and these positions were selected on the basis of length of service and internal politics. Moreover, for much of the amateur era a coach was not meant to join the team until 48 hours before a home test match, so leadership was by default much less formal. It was only on tour that a team culture could develop. Until the 1990s it was very much the luck of the draw as to who the team would have as coaches/managers and how effective they would be.

The research revealed some coaches during this period were examples of task oriented leaders (Hersey & Blanchard, 1984) as compared to ones like J.J. Stewart and Jack Gleeson who were highly regarded for their rugby acumen and people-oriented approach to coaching. However, when 'quality leadership' was not always apparent in formal roles such as coach or captain, then another part of the All Black organization assumed leadership responsibility. If the coaching was poor, for instance, the players stepped up. Alternatively, when there were player misdemeanours, the coach stood up and when hard decisions had to be made, the administrators/board made them. What mattered in the end was that the All Black organization continued to be successful, and that someone (individual or collective) fronted up to ensure that was maintained.

The development and introduction of the formal collective leadership style and approach of the 2004-2011 management group come after considerable research, investigation and analysis, backed up by the in-depth collective experience of those

involved with the All Black team at the time (Sir Brian Lochore, Sir Graham Henry, Wayne Smith and Steve Hansen) and the academic theory and expertise of specialists in education and psychology with whom they consulted (Howitt, 2012). The fact that the collective leadership group is selected is because their specialist skills, knowledge or experience endorses the theories of Denis et al (2001) and Lemay (2009). Collective leadership, as demonstrated by the All Blacks over time, is about embracing and marshalling human, cultural, and technological resources, where group members are motivated by a common purpose, and built by relationships with each other that are genuinely respectful and focused on achieving optimal results. More recently the All Blacks have tried to formalize this collective leadership process to incorporate the co-construction of shared purpose and work –that includes relationships in action that trust shared wisdom and the liberating of individual ability. In other words, collective leadership is enabled by promoting a learning culture within the All Blacks.

### **Leadership & Learning Culture**

Schein (2010, p. 235) regards leadership and organizational culture as ‘flipsides’ of the same coin, and states that “leaders will explore many mechanisms available to them to reinforce the adoption of their own beliefs, values and assumptions as the group gradually evolves”. As the organization succeeds the leader’s assumptions become shared. The creation of culture formation occurs usually through how leaders allocate resources, reward people, deal with critical incidents and communicate both implicitly and explicitly (Ashkanasy, Wilderom & Peterson, 2000). Recent All Black coach, Wayne Smith, for instance, stresses the need of an international coach to create an athlete-centred philosophy rather than the traditional prescriptive coach-centred style used in the past. His development as a coach is what he calls a ‘global

methodology’ of combining the analytical New Zealand approach with what he has learned experientially (Kolb, 1984) in Europe (Kidman, 2005). Kidman (2001) indicates that he is “noted for his ability to form a team culture that is more successful than that produced by traditional rugby approaches” (p. 37).

Wayne’s coaching philosophy has a strong emphasis on the empowerment principle...he wants players with the ability to persist, be relentless and not give up... players who will take responsibility for their preparation and performance... he believes in traditional values and the importance of the whole person not just the rugby player... he has an important belief the principle of honesty with players is extremely important (p. 38)... a key component of a coach’s development and enhanced performance is self-analysis... it is also important to get feedback from players (Kidman, 2001; pp. 43-45).

As part of this empowering philosophy, Smith alludes to the importance of a core group of leaders emphasising the importance of strong support staff and getting people all go to the right direction. Smith’s approach supports that of Chatman and Cha (2002, p. 7) who posit that “strong cultures enhance organizational performance by energising employees/team members, appealing to their higher ideals and values, and rallying them around a set of meaningful unified goals”. Such ideals excite commitment and effort. Strong cultures boost performance by shaping and coordinating the behaviour of team members by focusing on values and norms, and guiding their behaviour and decision making. Strong cultures exist when team members respond to stimulus because of their alignment to organizational values.

The most enlightening fact to emerge from the research in view of the importance of

leadership to all organizations is the formal system used by the 2004-2011 All Black teams. However the importance of leadership in all eras of the research cannot be understated as it highlights how the formal leaders of the All Blacks (captains and coaches), throughout their history have all contributed to the organizational culture of the All Blacks through formal and informal leadership that tends to be collective in nature. Culture is created by the beliefs, values and assumptions of leaders, or the learning experiences of the group as their organization evolves and new beliefs and values are introduced by new members. In this sense, collective leadership is an evolutionary development created by a view of retaining the best aspects of the All Black culture that contributes positively to their winning ethos (Fitzpatrick, 2011) and success in the past. It must also be recognised that organizations have life cycles of growth, maturation and decline if there is no change. A recent coach expressed this in terms of his own experience:

One thing we have learnt is that every six months or so we need to change and we don't change the core, we experiment around the fringes... there are very few unilateral decisions... everything we do, we try and feedback independence and self-reliance ... we haven't got all the answers by any means but we just keep developing and we keep its evolution rather than revolution and we just come up with the ideas and new ways of operating.

In 2004 the coaching staff recognised the need to change, and through this assessment came the development of the formalized collective leadership approach. It was built on the principles of the 'back seat of the bus' and the use of senior players by previous coaches as an important part of the decision making and leadership process. This commitment to leading change (Lewin, 1947) has assisted

the All Blacks to maintain their winning ethos in an increasingly competitive and to change macro environment. It requires a commitment from leadership because learning and change cannot be imposed on people in the old autocratic style of leading. The leadership group's involvement (players and management) is to diagnose what is going on, to determine what is needed to be done and then how the actual process of learning and change will take place. In essence, the All Blacks have responded to the change from amateur to professional rugby with a more 'professional' approach to the collective leadership that has traditionally characterized the functioning of the team.

## Conclusions

This research study has shown that a collective leadership approach (informal and formal) has been the key factor in helping the maintenance of the All Black's successful winning record over the past 60 years, irrespective of a changing socio-cultural environment. Leadership has many definitions, but is usually accepted as a specialised role or a shared influence process and is a critical component of any organization's culture and success (Yukl, 2008, 2010). The research clearly endorses Schein's (2010) contention that leadership is fundamental to culture, because culture is embedded, evolved and ultimately manipulated by leaders. Winning excellence is about the focusing of people intensely on strategy execution (Chatman & Cha, 2002). It is the leaders of organizations who are responsible for strategy formulation and execution, and the All Blacks through their coaches, captains and senior players was no exception.

The formal collective leadership in the recent All Blacks (Howitt, 2012), involving coaches, captain and senior players, has been successful because it is about embracing and marshalling human, cultural, and technological resources, in which group members are motivated by a

common purpose, and they build relationships with each other. These relationships are genuinely respectful and focused on achieving optimal results. This co-constructed shared purpose build strong work relationships in action, by creating trust, sharing wisdom or individual expertise and by encouraging the use of individual ability within a team perspective. It encourages a learning culture or problem solving approach to goal achievement through empowerment from which the whole team is benefited. The learning culture and leadership promote adaptation to change, when mutuality and synergy predominate over isolationism and individualism.

Collective leadership is still an emerging field, and most of the academic literature has focused on networks, groups, teams and bureaucratic organizations like those in health, education or the public sector (e.g. Denis et al, 2001; Chirichello, 2001; Lemay, 2009). Collective leadership is the strongest aspect in an organization with a learning culture which enables processes that bring together diverse people to create change. From the relationship people build with one another, they develop a shared focus on goals and objectives. Other benefits are the way it helps clearly to define roles, responsibilities; and expectations that hold each member to be accountable to one another. Implications of this study are for other businesses and team sport organizations, learning from how the All Blacks have incorporated a collective leadership style to maintain their winning legacy.

### Notes on Contributors

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