

# *Leadership and Organizational Culture Transformation in Professional Sport*

Doctoral Dissertation Abstract  
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Schein (1992) defined organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12), and organizational culture has long been recognized as a moderator to performance in business (Baalthazard, Cooke, & Potter, 2006; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Smerek & Denison, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomena of organizational culture change in professional sport (National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, and National Football League). Of the 32 teams that met criteria for inclusion, six agreed to participate. Specifically, leaders (owners or general managers) who had successfully brought their organizations through organizational culture change, as evidenced by their team’s performance, agreed to an in-person interview. Modified interpretive analysis was utilized to analyze the data (Hatch, 2002), from which five primary themes emerged (*Symptoms of a Dysfunctional Culture, My Way, Walk the Talk, Embedding New Culture, and Our Way*). These themes and their respective subthemes were highly inter-related and together formed an initial model for organizational culture change in professional sport: the Culture Change Cycle. Each theme along with the overall model is discussed in depth, and differences across sport and role are explained.