

Organizational culture of local sport organizations: What messages is it sending to participants?

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**Poster
Abstract 367**

The purpose of this study was to understand the values of local sport organizations, specifically figure skating clubs, as seen through organizational culture. Studying organizational culture attempts to explore an organization in depth by gaining an understanding of how people interpret the meanings of the environment around them (Martin, 2002). It may also give insight into the experiences of participants. Schein (1992) identifies three levels to analyze organizational culture: artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions. For the purpose of this study, organizational culture was studied by looking at artifacts (cultural manifestations) that included ceremonies and physical arrangements (e.g., architecture, interior decor, and props) (Martin, 2002; Slack, 1997). As Schein (1992) suggests values and other cultural aspects of a club are embedded in these manifestations of organizational culture. Organizational culture has been explored extensively in a business context (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991; Martin, 2002) and is just beginning to be explored in a sport environment (e.g., Colyer, 2000; Hoerber & Frisby, 2001). As organized youth sport activities continue to grow at the community level (i.e., Canadian Soccer Association had 854,750 participants in 2006 compared to 483,686 players in 1995 [CSA, 2006]) it is important to understand what draws a participant to one sport over another, or keeps a participant involved in a physical activity for life. Further exploration into the organizational culture of sport associations may help us understand the influence it has on an individual's experience.

In this poster I will show how the manifestations at three figure skating clubs depict the club's dominant values, which may in turn impact the experiences of the participants. The research followed a multiple case study approach. Two main data collection techniques were used in this study: observations and fieldnotes (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Content analysis was completed on observations and fieldnotes. Ceremonies (i.e., year end carnivals) and physical arrangements (i.e., bulletin boards and arena decor) were studied, via observations, at each club. Club carnivals showcase the club's participants upon completion of the main skating season. Unlike competitive skaters who may perform a number of times throughout the season, for many recreational skaters the year-end carnival is their only opportunity to perform in front of an audience. Therefore, the amount of time and effort placed on this production is indicative of a club's values. Physical arrangements make up another essential part of the organizational culture of a club, and are often the first part of the club to be seen. The interior decor often consists of cultural artifacts such as banners, bulletin boards, photos, and trophies (Slack, 1997). The manner in which skaters and programs are recognized through these artifacts may be indicative of how the club values its skaters.

Results showed that each club had one dominant value. The first club valued skaters based on their skating ability and accomplishments. They featured skaters in the carnival who had made significant figure skating accomplishments during the season. These achievements were also highlighted with the skaters' photos in the carnival program. Physical artifacts at the home arena also emphasized the importance of achievement through displays of photos and plaques of skaters who have made significant accomplishments. The second club valued each skater as an individual person. Soloists in carnivals appeared to be selected based on personal competence. The carnival program included a write up on each graduating skater outlining his or her future plans outside of skating. The third club valued skaters in relation to their place in the club and carnival with no direct reference to their skating accomplishments. The focus of the carnival was to present a cohesive show with the purpose of entertaining the audience. Skaters' photos appeared in the carnival program, but there was no mention of their skating level or accomplishments. The physical artifacts around the arena did not showcase individual skaters, but instead focussed on club news and elite Canadian figure skaters.

It can be assumed that the organizational culture of each club will affect each participant's experience. Showcasing high-level athletes may inspire young participants, creating role models and developing goals. For example, a participant might strive to achieve a higher level in order to receive recognition on the bulletin board. However, showcasing only elite athletes may also be intimidating to new members. If an individual is unable to identify with the participants who are showcased they may begin to question their place in the club. When individuals are valued as people rather than their accomplishments it may lead toward long-term participation in the sport.

Understanding the influence organizational culture has on its participants is a valuable asset for sport managers. Understanding the values that may be implied through ceremonies and artifacts will assist in creating stronger organizations, increasing membership, and creating positive experiences for all participants.

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