

## Understanding Artifacts in a Sport Organization from Three Perspectives

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Physical artifacts, such as trophies, photographs, and training equipment, are commonly seen in sport clubs. However, the type of artifacts a club may have and how artifacts are displayed may differ. For example, some figure skating arenas are covered with banners, trophies, and photographs of past and present competitors, while others are decorated with stars and happy faces, indicating achievements of recreational skaters (Mills & Hoerber, 2008; Mills, 2007). Some arenas have the latest training equipment and innovations, while others have very basic equipment. Despite the prevalence and prominence of artifacts in sport clubs, there is little research on how they are understood by the club's members. It is often assumed that everyone will experience the environment in a similar, positive fashion (Martin, 1992), and therefore which artifacts a club will display rarely receives much consideration. However, sport managers including board members, administrative staff, and coaches, may benefit from analyzing the physical environment from multiple perspectives and making more conscious decisions regarding artifacts.

Although artifacts are common in many organizations, the complexity of them is often overlooked (Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006, Vilnai-Yavetz, & Rafaeli, 2006). That is, even "physical and tangible objects are not static, immutable, and determinable once and for all" (Strati, 2006, p. 23). Artifacts are continuously being reinterpreted. As situations in the organization change (i.e., variations in training cycles, membership, and goals), the artifacts may be interpreted differently. As well, a new member may see an artifact differently than those who were present when the artifact was originally displayed. Sport managers must not assume their view of each artifact is shared by everyone; they must be open to the possibility of unintended, alternative understandings of artifacts. Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli (2006) present a framework for analyzing artifacts from three perspectives: instrumentality, aesthetics, and symbolism. Instrumentality refers to the use or function of an artifact, aesthetics refers to the sensory experience that comes from viewing an artifact, and symbolism encompasses the meanings associated with the artifact (Vilnai-Yavetz & Rafaeli, 2006). For example, in a figure skating arena, a mirror at the ice surface may be used to view a skater's body alignment (instrumental), add interest and depth to an otherwise plain wall (aesthetic), or emphasize perfection and appearance (symbolism).

The purpose of this study is to understand how participants perceive organizational artifacts in a figure skating club. The research project involves up to 14 figure skaters between 13 and 15 years of age. Data collection involves observations, fieldnotes, and photo-elicited interviews with each participant (2 per participant) (Collier, 1957; Samuels, 2004). The first interview involves skaters photographing their training environment, and then participating in an interview to discuss the content of the photos and why they took each of them. This interview will help identify which artifacts, if any, have meaning to participants. The second interview involves the researcher choosing 10 photographs of specific artifacts around the arena. The selected photos will include artifacts identified by the participants as well as artifacts identified by the researcher.

The purpose of the second interview is to understand how participants view the artifacts. Specifically, do they view the artifact instrumentally, aesthetically, or symbolically, or a combination of the three. A systematic data analysis will involve comparisons across the three data sources as well as within each data source. This presentation will highlight the artifacts skaters identified and how they related to them.

Research into artifacts may help managers better understand how to design training environments and the importance of choosing artifacts carefully (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004a). In the case of sport clubs, executive board members and coaches can make conscious decisions to develop, enhance or remove artifacts, creating a training environment that matches the club goals and intensions. Complete references will be provided at the presentation.