

The Commonwealth Games Association of Canada and the Canadian Sport Leadership Corp: An examination of organisational culture

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Aim of paper and research questions

In this study, the researchers examined the Commonwealth Games Association of Canada's international development through sport program, called the Canadian Sport Leadership Corp (CSLC). Canadian university graduates are recruited and placed within various participating host countries (e.g., South Africa, Caribbean) for 8-month internships with the primary goal of providing support for Commonwealth countries to advance various social and educational initiatives through use of sport. The primary purpose of this study was to uncover the organisational culture within the CSLC program and determine how key values and beliefs influence post-graduates' internship experience. A further objective was to describe the ideal organisational culture and how that relates to program strategies and outcomes. A second purpose was to determine the existing gaps, if any, between the espoused organisational culture and that which participants actually experienced. To that end, the following research questions guided this study: 1) what is the cultural profile according to the program founders/leaders?; 2) what is the cultural profile according to interns?; and, 3) is there a difference in the espoused and actual profile?

Literature review

Organisational culture effects company operations and has been shown to influence a number of important success indicators (Schein, 1991). Commonly known as organisational values, beliefs, and basic assumptions, organisational culture explains why an organisation operates in a particular fashion (Schein, 1991). Understanding an organisation's culture can help inform corporate strategies, provide clearer meaning for employees with respect to their work, and create opportunities to strengthen how things are done within an organisation (Flynn & Chatman, 2001).

Organisational culture evolves from the organisation's founding members' original conceptions and develops further as new members enter (Tyrell, 2000). Through members' ongoing negotiation and practices, acceptable and unacceptable behavioural standards or "ways of doing things" develop (Kusluvan & Karamustafa, 2003). Daily organisational practices are manifestations of what is most important to leaders and reinforces the basic principles of why an organisation exists (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2008). To uncover an organisation's culture, researchers often examine three levels: 1) artifacts and behaviours; 2) beliefs and corporate values; and, 3) basic assumptions (Schein, 1991). Such analysis is important to uncover the rich and deep meaning surrounding organisational tasks and objectives (Alvesson, 2002).

Research design and data analysis

A qualitative research design was utilised to explore the organisational culture of the CSLC. An interview guide was created and pilot tested to frame and clarify research aims. Questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions regarding their placement context and projects, artifacts (e.g., stories, rituals), beliefs and values (e.g., mission, goals), and basic assumptions (e.g., taken for granted beliefs).

To recruit participants, a confederate working within the Commonwealth Games Association electronically sent a letter of information to CSLC participants, outlining the research and inviting them to participate. Interested participants were instructed to send a signed consent form directly to the researchers by electronic mail and schedule an interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather participants' perceptions and experiences, which helped to create an understanding of organisational culture. Coding categories were identified based on recurrent and emergent themes through employing a process of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In total, 23 interviews were conducted and recorded, lasting between 35 and 70 minutes each. Three participants were designated founders/leaders of the program and 20 were past internship participants.

Results

Minor differences were found with respect to the espoused and actual culture of the program, according to founders'/leaders' and participants' respective perceptions. Certain values were found to be strongly shared (e.g., caring, development, education), while a significant gap existed between others (e.g., justice, connectedness). Such findings may implicate that the organisation could revisit strategies if they wish to engender more consistent messaging and align their key values and beliefs. Participants also reported experiencing a number of important leadership components (e.g., self- and social-awareness) and characteristics (e.g., self confidence and communication). According to the founders/leaders interviewed, such leadership components are a desired outcome and could be viewed as a basic assumption of participating in the internship program. Further, some reported espoused elements of the ideal organisational culture (e.g., leadership development) were found to be aligned with the actual organisational culture and thus support stated program objectives of providing opportunities for young Canadians to develop leadership skills.

Discussion and conclusion

In this presentation, the system of CSLC program delivery will be outlined; a richer description of how things are done organisationally will thus be given. Further, results regarding the espoused and actual organisational culture will be discussed, and implications will be drawn with respect to how knowing organisational culture can assist in delivering a development through sport program of this kind. Future research directions involving the CSLC program will also be discussed.

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