

Examining How Canadian Hockey League General Managers Build and Sustain Cultures of Excellence

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Leaders within high-performing sport contexts are under increasing amounts of pressure to build a successful (winning) program. To date, most research in this domain has focused on coaches and athletes, which does not account for teams that have an individual with a greater role, the General Manager. Few positions in sport are as multifaceted and demanding as the General Manager. The purpose of the present study was to gain insight into how ice hockey General Managers created and sustained a culture of excellence. Semistructured interviews were conducted with five experienced Canadian Hockey League (CHL) General Managers who took over poor programs and turned them around on and off the ice, including leading their teams to championship victories. Using a thematic analysis, the findings revealed that the General Managers played a key role in creating a cultural transformation of excellence. This occurred by implementing a set of values and principles that were focused on holistic athlete development and maintained a level of excellence within every aspect of the organization. Additionally, each General Manager facilitated a cultural transformation by implementing a clear and consistent vision that led to the creation of a strong organizational culture that ultimately resulted in continued success on and off the ice. Findings from this study could provide valuable information for current and future leaders in both high-performing sport and business domains by providing crucial knowledge on how to build and sustain a culture of excellence.

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Leaders within high-performing sport contexts are under increasing amounts of pressure to build successful (winning) programs (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Frontiera, 2010; Urquhart et al., 2020; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). This is due to many factors, especially considering the increased financial rewards associated with achieving success in high-performance sport (Côté & Gilbert, 2009;

Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Professional sport coaches and sport executives alike are being increasingly scrutinized by their respective national sport councils, governing bodies, club owners, the media, the public, and fans (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Moreover, the high-performance sport environment has been described as dynamic, complex, unpredictable, and even chaotic at times (Purdy & Jones, 2011). Consequently, leading a team to even a single championship in such a difficult environment is a significant achievement that has only been accomplished by a few leaders in high-performance sport organizations, whereas leading a team to multiple league titles is even more difficult.

Researchers have begun to study the knowledge and strategies used by coaches who have attained success by winning numerous championships

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