

NURTURING A CULTURE OF IMPROVEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY
FOLLOW-UP OF THE 2005 AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

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Monya Jameson

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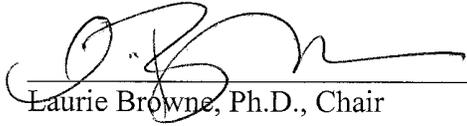
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ABSTRACT

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Continuous program improvement is an administrative practice that promises a variety of benefits for camps. A youth program that engages in program improvement benefits youth by fostering developmental outcomes such as competence, confidence, character and caring. With this in mind, the American Camp Association sought to better understand how some camps promote developmental outcomes more effectively than others. This project, entitled the Program Improvement Project (PIP) was initiated in 2005 in conjunction with Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (YDSI). PIP was developed using a Community Action Framework for Youth Development. This current study sought to examine the longitudinal impact of the 2005 PIP among the 23 participating camps. A mixed method approach was used beginning with an online survey to explore the extent to which the camps engaged in program improvement today and the specific

affordances and barriers associated with their current implementation. Fourteen camps responded with four chosen and classified as high, moderate and minimal PIP implementation. To identify broad themes, interview data were independently coded and collaboratively discussed by the research team. Artifacts from the 2005 PIP (PIP implementation plan, camp demographics) and current artifacts were analyzed. Five themes emerged from the interview data. Findings suggested that affordances to continuous program improvement included a focus on developmental outcomes, stakeholder buy-in, collecting and using data. Barriers included limited resources and administrative turnover. Administrative turnover negatively impacted camps ability to maintain a culture of continuous program improvement. Camps should consider ways to reduce the effects of administrator turnover through succession planning and support of administrators well being.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Continuous program improvement is an administrative practice that promises a variety of benefits for camps and other youth recreation programs. Camp administrators benefit similarly because program improvement processes promote overall program quality which include activities, effectively trained staff, and organizational efficiency (Smith, Akiva, Sugar, Lo, Frank, Peck, Cortina & Devaney, 2012). Funders, such as donors, supporting agencies, and parents, benefit from program improvement because these efforts create direct linkages between resources and targeted youth outcomes (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Finally, a youth program that engages in program improvement benefits youth by fostering outcomes such as competence, confidence, character, and caring (Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestsdottir, Naudeau, Jelicic, Alberts, Smith, Bobek, Richman-Raphael, Simpson, Christiansen & vonEye, 2005).

While the benefits of continuous program improvement are clear, little is known about the factors that affect camp administrators' implementation of continuous program improvement over time. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of continuous program improvement among camps who participated in a 2005 initiative facilitated by the American Camp Association (ACA) that sought to understand how some camps promoted positive youth development more effectively than others. ACA

initiated this project, entitled the Program Improvement Project (PIP), in partnership with Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (YDSI) to explore how a program improvement process at camp affected specific youth development outcomes (YDSI, 2006). The 2005 PIP study engaged 23 camps in the process of gathering information from campers, sharing this information with campers and staff, linking practices to campers' experiences, developing plans to improve practices, and examining changes in campers' perceptions based on program improvements. The findings of this study revealed an increase in the four developmental areas, or supports and opportunities, after the one year process. While the original project saw the participating camps through this cycle of program improvement, it did not include any follow-up assessment. This study sought insights into internal and external impacts on PIP implementation and to discover whether or not these camps have sustained a continuous program improvement process.

PIP was developed by YDSI based on Gambone and colleagues (2002) Community Action Framework for Youth Development. The framework provides a systematic & holistic way to design programs to improve quality and positively impact youth development. In a youth development setting, these supports (e.g., supportive relationships) and opportunities (e.g., opportunities for skill building) flourish (Gambone et al., 2004). This framework is based upon a theory of change. Theory of change is meant to create a continuous program improvement process that begins with collecting information from campers and other stakeholders, examining problem areas, creating an action plan, implementing improvements, and ongoing assessment (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002). Theory of change approach creates an ongoing planning process (Connell & Kubisch, 1998) that identifies the relationship between practice and outcomes.

To present the study, we will first discuss the history of camps and their impact on youth development. Having laid that foundation, we will talk about the ways in which programs target youth development outcomes and how focusing on program quality has changed over time. This leads to a discussion on the administrative practice of continuous program improvement and how it relates to promoting quality youth programs. An introduction to the American Camp Association and their role in camp research will be followed by a review of their research efforts over a three year period which included a yearlong Program Improvement Process conducted in 2005. We will describe the methodology for this study and in the results section provide details on the themes that emerged during the interview process. Finally, findings are discussed in regard to the affordances and barriers to camps current implementation of a continuous program improvement process.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include a low response rate from the original survey that was sent to the 23 camps who participated in the 2005 PIP. Starting out with an already small sample size (23), a 61% response rate was lower than anticipated. The four case study camps represented different types of camps, two were faith based, and two were privately operated. The private operated camps rely heavily on outside funders and the two faith based camps rely on fee for service and organizational support. With that being said, the ACA studies found that camp types did not have a significant impact on the results.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Summer Camps

A historical background provides a perspective on the unique nature of summer camps and their positive impact on youth. Summer camps have continued to enhance the lives of children across the country since their beginning in the early 19th century. During this time, there was a great migration of people moving from the countryside into cities. Life in the country required the contribution of the children to household duties and the demands of growing crops and raising animals. This work provided a great deal of outdoor physical activity where boys learned to be tough and rugged and girls learned to be domestic. Their leisure time was filled with open spaces where they could roam and play without direct adult supervision. However, with more families moving into cities, children were growing up in urban neighborhoods and city suburbs. Children's "free play" was taking place in open lots and in the streets or within the confines of their homes (Paris 2008; Van Slyck, 2006).

At the same time, numerous professions emerged from pediatrics, psychology, and child study organizations all of which "recognized the intensifying social value of young people and promised to address their special, age-specific needs" (Paris, 2008, p. 41). Professionals believed that being outdoors was important for children growing up in cities, and summer camp participation provided them a healthy environment to develop

socially and learn good citizenship (Paris, 2008; Van Slyk, 2006). The earliest records show that the Gunnery Camp may have been the first summer camp established 1881 (Elles, 1979). From that time, the camp experience continued to grow and by the late 19th century, several hundred summer camps were formed in the United States. Many of the early pioneers were educators we had a passion and vision to help youth develop, learn and grow in a natural environment. Individuals such as Hedley Seldon Dimock dedicated their lives to the camps they created (Elles, 1979).

Guggenheimer (1928) who was President of the New York Section of the Camp Directors Association said, “The greatest individual contribution which has been made to the education of American youth is the summer camp.” The importance that camp staff have on the development of campers was also recognized by John Sprague M.D. who stated, “The personnel of the camp staff is the greatest factor in their (campers) accomplishments” (1928). Camps were believed to be a complement to school – “one begins where the other leaves off.” (Guggenheimer, 1928).

A gap in summer camp research existed between the 1960s and the turn of the 21st Century. Paris (2008) explained that there was a decline in the traditional summer camp attendance. Paris attributed this decline to factors such as that the Baby Boomer generation outgrew camps which resulted in fewer camp aged children, a higher divorce rate, the economic recession and increased inflation in the 1970’s discouraged parents from sending their children to camp. Paris also suggested increased land values kept new providers from entering the market. Today, there are approximately 11 million children and adults attending some 12,000 camps in the United States (ACA Facts and Trends, 2014).

Since their inception, summer camps have continued to expand and grow in their mission to enrich the lives of youth. While many of the traditions that make camp special remain, camps have evolved to meet the cultural and social changes that face professionals in the 21st Century. However, there is still a need to continue to explore the ways in which camps foster an environment that promotes positive youth development. The focus of this study is on the administrative practice of continuous program improvement to achieve program quality and how it fosters youth development.

Youth Development

Improving camps so that they consistently promote youth development has been the goal of youth serving organizations for many years. However, the ways in which youth development is viewed has evolved over time. Lerner and colleagues (2005) suggested that since the earliest discussions of youth development beginning in 1904 and even through to the 1990s, youth development was actually treated as the absence of negative behaviors, or the “deficit model” of measurement. Most of the funding was spent on programs that targeted adolescents who were considered high risk and who were already displaying negative behaviors (Gambone & Connell, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). Some argued that trying to change these negative behaviors at that stage in development was actually too late. Around 1993, youth development advocates began lobbying for more funding for prevention programs that targeted “at risk” youth (Gambone & Connell). However, Gambone & Connell argued that even this model failed to address developmental outcomes over the long term.

Lerner et al. (2005) based their view of youth development upon developmental systems theory. They suggested that social and environmental influences play a role in the developmental process. They also suggested that a positive youth development approach views youth as a “resource to be developed” rather than just subjects being treated for negative behaviors such as violence, drug and alcohol abuse. The goal is to create an environment where healthy development occurs and youth receive the support and develop the skills they need to grow into successful adults. To create this environment, Catalano and colleagues (2004) suggested that a program should achieve as many of the following as possible: 1) Foster resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future and prosocial norms; 2) Promote bonding, social competence, moral, social, emotional, behavioral and/or cognitive competence; and 3) Provide recognition for positive behavior and opportunity for prosocial involvement.

Youth serving programs such as summer camps have been seeking ways to structure programs and activities that promote and measure youth development. One method of measurement is through outcomes assessment. With this method, a camp director or camp staff chooses a desired outcome and then structures the activities and/or program accordingly. For example, if skill development is the desired outcome, an activity is specifically structured to promote skill development. The participant skill level is measured prior and after participation to determine if the desired outcome has been achieved. While outcome measurement can be effective, some recognize there are weaknesses to this method. Factors completely unrelated and outside of the program staff's control such as home and school interactions can impact outcomes (Akiva,

Cortina, Eccles & Smith, 2013; Henderson, Bialeschki, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker & Marsh, 2007). Given the example above, the participant may be participating in the activity outside of the program which would directly impact the outcome.

Program Quality

More recently, there has been an overall shift from focusing solely on outcome assessment to assessing developmental outcomes in addition to program quality. The notion is that a quality program will result in positive developmental outcomes. An important part of program quality is the concept of point of service (Grossman, Goldsmith, Sheldon & Arbreton, 2009; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2007). Point of service relates to assessing what is actually going on at the program through social interactions between participants and staff, and the delivery of content. In point of service quality, the measurement is the program, not the participant (Yohalem, Granger & Pittman, 2009; Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2007). When measuring quality, Yohalem and colleagues warned that there should not be a comparison of one program to another. Rather, measuring quality is more related to setting standards within a program and measuring how that program is performing against those standards.

Because point of service is where the interaction and content is delivered, managers and staff play a critical role in developing youth (Akiva, et al., 2013; Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2007). Yohalem and colleagues (2009) also contend that the interactions between participants and staff are a more powerful predictor of effectiveness than broader structural features such as the qualification of staff and staff to student ratios. Akiva also

found a near significant relationship in that quality programs create a positive culture resulting in fewer turnovers by managers and staff.

Point of service quality promotes intentional, systematic efforts to improve and positively impact youth. It includes ongoing assessment and looks at the setting rather than individual youth outcomes (Yohalem, Granger & Pittman, 2009). However, measuring program quality at the point of service takes resources as the evaluation includes direct observation, staff and participant surveys and evaluation of attendance records (Yohalem, Granger & Pittman, 2009). Yet, data collection and program evaluation have become more important than ever to demonstrate outcomes and create accountability. With the growing body of research that supports the idea that quality programs promote positive developmental and learning outcomes, more federal, state and private funds are available to youth serving programs. This makes measurement and accountability paramount (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). A program must demonstrate that they are effectively promoting youth development and providing quality programs to compete for these funds. Therefore, dedicating resources to this endeavor is critical. Measuring program quality also provides administrators with important data to make informed decisions about critical program improvements. It is also important to parents as they entrust their children to program directors and need assurances that their child is well cared for and is benefiting from participation. But most of all, providing quality programs benefits youth as it provides them with the tools they need to become successful adults.

Continuous Program Improvement

Another way to approach program quality and measurement is the administrative practice of continuous program improvement. The work of Gambone and Connell (2002) to develop the Community Action Framework provides a more systematic and holistic way to design programs to improve quality and positively impact youth development. This framework not only focuses on individual youth, but it also focuses on the supports and opportunities youth need to flourish within a camp program. These supports and opportunities include 1) Adequate nutrition, health and shelter; 2) Multiple supportive relationships with adults and peers; 3) Meaningful opportunities for involvement and membership; 4) Challenging and engaging activities and learning experiences; and 5) Safety (Gambone & Connell, 2005). It is built upon program quality assessment which is based upon a theory of change approach to program evaluation. Theory of change is meant to create an ongoing planning process (Connell & Kubisch, 1999). This theory of change means: 1) To improve what youth experience, you must change organizational practice; 2) To change organizational practice requires structured, systematic, intentional review by and involvement of youth (campers) and staff; 3) Reassessment of plans and strategies must occur following implementation (ACA, 2006). The Community Action Framework provided the basis for the benchmark study conducted by ACA in 2004 that led to the Program Improvement Project in 2005.

American Camp Association

The American Camp Association (ACA) is a nonprofit, national organization formed in 1910 by individuals who believed strongly in providing health and safety

standards for camps in order to provide a safe and enriching environment for youth. Its mission is “enriching the lives of children, youth, and adults through the camp experience.” Through its commitment to research, ACA provides resources and tools to assist its 2300 accredited camps to provide quality youth camp experiences. Accreditation includes up to 300 standards for health, safety, and program quality (ACA, 2014). There are now more than 12,000 day and resident camps in the United States, with more than 11 million children and adults attending each year. These include camps offered by non-profit groups, religious organizations, and for-profit businesses. More than 1,500,000 people are employed as camp counselors, unit directors, recreation leaders and support staff (ACA, 2014).

American Camp Association Research

In 2002, ACA hired Philliber Research Associates to conduct the first of three national studies. While historically camps have provided enriching experiences for youth, the goal of ACA was to measure the developmental outcomes of the camp experience. Some 80 camps and 5,000 families participated in this study (Directions, 2005) which measured the following four domains: Positive Identity, Social Skills, Physical & Thinking Skills, and Positive Values & Spirituality. This study confirmed that the camp experience positively contributes to developmental outcomes. With that knowledge, ACA embarked on the second phase to answer the questions, how much does camp contribute to this developmental process and what makes some camps more effective than others?

To answer these questions, ACA commissioned Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (YDSI) a national nonprofit organization. The design of this study was to

provide benchmarks of camp quality. The study framework was the “Community Action Framework for Youth Development” (Gambone & Connell, 2009). “This framework focuses on four supports and opportunities that young people need to experience in a youth development program in order to move towards these long-term outcomes” (ACA, 2004, p. 3). These supports and opportunities are 1) Supportive relationships so youth can experience guidance, emotional and practical support; and adults and peers knowing who they are and what’s important to them; 2) Safety, so youth feel physically and emotionally secure; 3) Youth Involvement, so that young people can be involved in meaningful roles and responsibility, have input into decision-making, have opportunities for leadership, and feel a sense of belonging; and 4) Skill Building, so that youth can have challenging and interesting learning experiences that help them build a wide array of skills; and experience a sense of growth and progress (ACA, 2004). The results showed that campers reported optimal levels for Supportive Relationships and Skill Building, but the percentage of campers experiencing optimal levels of Youth Involvement and, to a lesser extent Safety, was surprisingly low (ACA, 2004). These results provided the foundation for the next phase, the Program Improvement Project.

In the summer of 2005, 23 of the 80 original camps participated in a program improvement process under the guidance and direction of ACA and YDSI. Camps used the data collected during the 2004 study to determine where they could strengthen the experience of campers in the four developmental areas described above. They conducted a self-assessment of 9 organizational practices. These include 1) Structural (S): Low youth to staff/volunteer ratios, safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces, and continuity and consistency of care; 2) Organizational Policies (P): Ongoing, results-based

staff and organizational improvement process, flexibility in allocating available resources, and community engagement; 3) Organizational Activities (A): Range of diverse, interesting and skill-building activities, youth engagement in organizational decision making, high, clear and fair standards.

Each camp then surveyed campers, created action plans that included strategies for improvement, and then surveyed campers at the end of the process to determine which strategies were most effective.

Most camps designed strategies to increase the number of campers who reported optimal levels in Youth Involvement and Skill Building with 83% experiencing improvement in both of these areas. More than one third of the campers strengthened Supportive Relationships and Safety even though they were not included in camp strategies. These results showed that “intentional, camper-center assessment and planning yielded a rich experience for youth” (Innovations, 2006, p. 1). However, camps that implemented changes in all three areas of organizational practice – camp structure, policies and activities were twice as successful at producing change in supports and opportunities than those who chose only to address one or two areas.

While the Program Improvement Project (PIP) saw the participating camps through this cycle of program improvement, it did not include any follow-up assessment. This study sought insights into internal and external impacts on PIP implementation and to discover the extent to which these camps have sustained a continuous program improvement process over time.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used to explore the current day nature of continuous program improvement among the original 23 participating camps. A survey was developed by the research team and ACA staff with the questions designed to get a general sense of the nature of each camp's PIP implementation today. The survey was emailed using Survey Monkey, an online survey service to the camp administrators responsible for PIP implementation in 2005, or their replacement. This survey explored the extent to which the camps engaged in systematic program improvement today and the specific affordances and challenges associated with their current implementation. The 10-item survey included questions such as, "How would you rate the degree to which the PIP plan developed for you in 2005 continues to be used at your camp today?" and "Please describe the single biggest challenge you faced implementing your PIP plan since 2005". Survey respondents were also asked if they would be willing to participate in an in-depth interview following the survey.

A total of 14 camp administrators responded to the survey; 7 of which indicated they were very familiar with the 2005 PIP plan. When asked "How would you rate the degree to which your PIP plan continues to be used at your camp today?" Thirty-eight percent reported "more than it was in 2005," 30% reported "less than in 2005," 7.7% reported "same as in 2005," and 23% reported "not at all." Eleven camps offered to

serve as a case study. From these respondents we separated the camps into those who identified themselves as “high,” “moderate,” and “minimal” PIP implementation. Of these eleven, four were chosen based upon the details in the survey responses.

Once the camps were selected, camp directors from each of the four camps participated in in-depth interviews ranging from 30 to 45 minutes that probed into the questions from the original survey. Open ended questions were asked such as: 1) What has been the most significant changes at your camp since the 2005 study? 2) You also mentioned a change in culture, can you tell me what you mean by that statement? 3) How did you get the staff to buy in to this process? The interviewer also used probes, such as 1) You made a comment that as long as you are there that (PIP) will be part of camp. Are there processes or practices in place that will help continue that practice beyond you? Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. To identify broad themes, interview data were independently coded by a research team that included a faculty member who conducts camp research and a research assistant who works for the American Camp Association.

First, all four transcripts were read, highlighting text that clearly identified barriers or challenges to camps current PIP implementation. This large amount of data was categorized into themes that emerged from the decontextualizing process. Throughout the coding process, the team used Glaser’s (1965) technique of constant comparison to ensure reliability. These themes were then collaboratively discussed by the research team. To ensure the findings of the research team were dependable and confirmable, peer debriefing technique was used by including a third independent reviewer also evaluated the interview data (Jackson et al., 2007; Houghton, 2013).

The researcher conducted an in-depth review of artifacts from the 2005 PIP (e.g., PIP Implementation Plan, camp demographics) and physical evidence such as staff manuals, strategic planning documents, and website content. This process provided additional insight into the four camps continuous program improvement process. The researcher also kept a detailed journal throughout the process. Below we describe the four case study camps using content analysis information, and the themes that emerged from the interview data as they relate to program improvement processes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Sample

Camp A is an independent non-profit resident camp located in the Midwest founded in 1937. Longevity is evident as over the 76 year history of the camp, they have only had five Executive Directors and five Camp Directors. Approximately 450 underprivileged boys and girls attend this camp each summer. Ages range from 7 to 16 with at least 80% coming from single parent families living in poverty. Given the limited resources and challenged environments that these kids live in, this camp strives to “be the place for these kid’s childhoods, the best place many of them have ever been, their most treasured space and time.” Camp materials suggest that around 60% of the campers return each year. Their mission statement reads “Camp enriches lives through camp experiences.” Surprisingly, tuition for a typical 1-week session is \$50, and 26 day sessions are \$75. These rates are drastically reduced as the actual cost of camp is \$4160 for a 26 day session. The fundraising efforts Camp A is committed to with private and corporate sponsors and donors make this possible. This past year, they hosted a “Blue Jean Ball” that raised \$140,000 for their camp program.

Each year, Camp A hires 60 to 65 staff. As a result of the PIP process, the camp director reported that the staff was mentally, emotionally and physically stronger than in previous years and they enjoyed the variety of programs. Staff was pleased to

have more input in the process, even though more planning took place by campers. One of the reasons is that staff was provided training in preparation for the PIP process. The staff training included how to engage campers in decision making and many examples were provided to assist staff in this transition. The year after PIP, the staff return rate was 55%, and since then it has increased to 60%.

At this camp, one will find traditional camp activities such as adventure, sports, aquatics, outdoor living, and creative and performing arts. However, Camp A also offers a school year follow up program to sustain relationships that were built at camp and help campers maintain the skills they learned at camp. Recognizing the issues associated with summer learning loss, this camp has a mandatory reading club during summer camp that is required for all third grade campers. The goal is to create a love for reading and improve literacy. Through data collection, they confirmed that this program is producing positive results. Another program unique to Camp A is one targeted at older campers. The teens spend time learning to prepare for critical life events such as applying for college. The content analysis revealed ongoing references to youth development and the PIP supports and opportunities. As an example, their camp newsletter states, “for more than 70 years, camp has been helping children realize a future beyond anything they could have imagined and providing them with the tools to achieve it” (Summer, 2013). Camp A reported that their PIP implementation is more now than in 2005 and has been identified as the high implementation camp.

A moderate implementation camp, Camp B is a residential camp located on 211 acres in the Midwest. This camp is a faith-based camp offered by a church organization founded in 1924 and has had the same Director since 1985. When founded,

a Native American theme was created and many of the activities were associated with Native American culture. While the tradition of naming cabins American Indians names still exists, this camp has made substantial changes since PIP and has adopted a culture of change and offers camper choice on a continual basis. Approximately 160 boys and girls ages 8 to 16 participate each summer during each of its 1, 2 and 4 week sessions. Their mission is “to partner with parents to develop confident, responsible, and respectful youth who gain skills and have fun through a quality camp experience in a youth-centered community.” Typical camp tuition is \$1,180, \$2360, and \$4405 respectively with financial assistance offered to low income applicants. The camp hires about 40 staff each year, 90% of whom typically return with many of the staff coming up through the ranks as campers themselves. Typical camp activities include over 40 choices which include outdoor sports, traditional sports, archery, climbing, aquatics, riflery & trap shooting, and arts to name a few.

During the PIP process, the Camp Director felt that the most impactful change they made was using the PIP “language” more. This language is associated with the supports and opportunities and positive youth development. For example, they talked about relationships, pointed out leadership opportunities, and defined connectedness to the campers. While these opportunities existed in the past, talking about them helped the campers make a connection between what they were doing at camp and the outcomes associated with them. The Director shared that when they rewrote the mission statements they incorporated the “language” of PIP. It is evident also in much of their recruiting materials. Every camp activity is described in their website with the words “safety” and “choice” listed.

During staff training, they focused more on physical and emotional safety as well as camper choice, leadership and taking time to build relationships. This camp was one that included strategies for change in all three organizational practices during PIP. Some of the changes included redeveloping their mission statement, cabin structure and programmatic improvements.

Camp C was also a faith-based camp associated with a church organization founded in 1953 and its first church affiliated boys camp started in 1958 with 25 boys. The website contains a quote from the founder who dreamed of a “place where youths would be free and away from the temptations of the streets, where they could enjoy nature and become acquainted with it firsthand...a place where they could commune, under supervision, with their Creator and away from paths so frequently leading to delinquency.” This now co-ed resident camp sits on 225 acres in the Midwest and serves approximately 1000 boys and girls ages 7 to 17 during one and two-week sessions throughout the summer. Fees range from \$445 to \$600 per one week and \$775 to \$895 per two week sessions with scholarships offered in some cases. This camp also serves as a year round retreat center for affiliated churches. Approximately 50 staff are members are hired each summer. The camp director that was involved during PIP left shortly afterward, and one of the staff took over as camp director. Strategies adopted during PIP include a heavy emphasis on camper choice, or “challenge by choice”. One successful programmatic strategy adopted was to allow each cabin to create their own rules and they changed the overall camp rules to just five. This resulted in more consistent and fair enforcement of the rules. In the surveys conducted at the end of the PIP process, the director shared that the staff seemed to enjoy themselves more because they felt they had

“stronger” programs. During staff trainings, they included sessions on supports and opportunities so that staff was better equipped to meet the needs of the campers.

Camp activities found at Camp C include arts and crafts, swimming, dream sports, archery, Going Ballistic, mountain biking (mountain biking is for campers in the trailblazer program and above), and fire/fort building. The camp motto is Faith, Fun and Friends and their mission statement reads, “We invite people of all ages to encounter Jesus Christ in all creation, experience a fun and vibrant Catholic community, and be challenged to ever more deeply know, love, and serve God and neighbor.” This camp director responded that their PIP implementation is less than in 2005, or non-existent which identified them as the minimal implementation camp. Interestingly, after the interview the camp director shared that many of the strategies that they developed in 2005 are still in place today. However, no one realized that it was due to the PIP.

The final case study camp, Camp D was a resident camp located in the Eastern United States that serves 1400 boys and girls ages 6 to 14, and 80% come from families living in poverty. This nonprofit organization offers year round programs in addition to summer camps. Consequently, they are challenged to offer unique and challenging activities for participants. The benefit is that they are able to spend more time with the kids to develop long-term relationships. Their mission statement reads, “We inspire youth to unlock their potential and positively impact the world.” This was rewritten after PIP and was one of the PIP strategies adopted by this camp. Camp D also chose to make improvements to all three areas of organizational structures. The tuition for a typical one two-week camp session is \$400, and financial assistance is available based upon a sliding scale. Some of the participants come from referrals in the

community. Camp focuses on summer learning loss and they have introduced literacy elements into their summer program. Nearly every activity at camp introduces literacy elements (journals, reading, newsletters, and word games). Their camp brochure states, “To provide at risk youth with a supportive community and access to experiences and resources that help them discover self-confidence, graduate from high school, seek higher education and become members of the next generation of diverse leaders.” Camp D employs approximately 200 frontline staff each year, 40% of whom return year after year. About 40% of their staff are camp alumni. In their staff recruitment materials on their website, rather than focusing on the just the fun aspect of being camp staff, they explain “Set a good example for campers by fostering the values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility.” Camp D also brings in outside influences to camps such as a financial literacy teacher and a guidance counselor. Camp activities include instructional and free swim, arts and crafts, sports and games, climbing wall, fishing, archery and more. This camp director responded that their PIP implementation was the same as in 2005, therefore they were identified as a moderate implementation camp.

Themes

Several themes emerged from the interview data that provided insight into the nature of continuous improvement at the four camps. These themes include: (1) PIP was the impetus for reexamining missions and strategic plans that continue to drive camps today; (2) staff buy in becomes a cultural component critical to camp success; (3) camper engagement, feedback and introducing camper choice was evident in program elements; (4) PIP created a culture of continuous program improvement and shared beliefs; and (5) PIP led to intentional programming to promote positive youth development outcomes.

PIP was the impetus for reexamining missions and strategic plans that continue to drive camps today. Results of the 2005 study showed that “camps that implemented changes across all three organization practices (structure, policy and activities) were twice as successful in producing change across development and supports” (Bialeschki et al., 2008, p.1). Not all camps chose to make changes in policy. Two of the camps, one high and one moderate, redeveloped their strategic plan as a result of the 2005 PIP. After explaining multiple program and organizational improvements, the high implementation camp director stated, “This all comes out of our strategic plan by the way,” and another shared, “The strategic plan was very much guided by the ideas that we had developed as a part of this process (PIP).” The extent that one camp embraced PIP and the notion of change and continuous program improvement is evident in their Strategic Plan as it states:

We stand at the precipice of the third opportunity, and the largest challenge, in the history of our camp. When we adopt this Strategic Plan at the end of 2007, we are committed to making sweeping changes to our summer program.

When reviewing Camp D’s website, policy level changes were evident in the “Our Plan for the Future” link. The title “Our Strategic Plan Growth – Evolution and Innovation –A new program model is born” describes their commitment to continuous program improvement. Yet, they understand the importance of smart growth, as the strategic plan also includes “Our goal is to grow without sacrificing any of the quality that makes our model successful.”

All four of the study camps reexamined and updated their mission statement as one of their PIP strategies. Camp C director shared, “We really used the study to rewrite our mission statement.” Another director stated that they used the language learned during PIP as a basis for their mission statement, “To partner with parents to

develop confident, responsible, and respectful youth who gain skills and have fun through a quality camp experience in a youth-centered community.”

The high and moderate implementation camps engaged individuals at all levels of the organization including staff, leadership and their board of directors to reexamine their mission statement and strategic plans. As the high implementation director explained, “So the board members were involved in the conversation all along. With senior administrative staff we are pulling it in with a combined training of the frontline staff.” With everyone involved in the process, the strategic plan becomes a living document that changes with the organization. It was best said by the high implementation camp director, “We are not one of those organizations that when done writing their strategic plans set the thing on the shelf and forget about it. We have been living the strategic plan as we possibly can.” The low implementation camp involved the administrative team in their PIP process. Therefore, when these team members left, this information was not available.

Staff buy in becomes a cultural component critical to camp success. Another finding from the PIP reporting was the importance of staff and administrative buy in to the process. Without staff buy in, PIP or any meaningful changes would have been difficult to implement. When the directors first approached staff about the survey results, some felt threatened. Traditionally, camp staff made decisions about crafts, schedules, and more. As many were previously campers, they understood the role of the counselor and looked forward to assuming that role. Camp B director’s experience suggested that, “The staff is so excited to be counselors, that for them to turn the leadership over to the kids has been difficult” and “We shifted decisions even during camp prep based upon

previous year's surveys. Rather than staff making choices about crafts, etc. these decisions are driven by camper choice. This can be difficult for front line staff." To overcome this obstacle, it is important to allow staff to be involved in other ways that help them feel that they are contributing. Camp A director explained:

We involved them. We said you choose the outcome that you think is most important for kids in your village, and then let's work together to develop some programmatic components, and I would call it types of daily living because they are not all programmatic. They are the ways in which we relate to kids. They are in the ways we help kids to understand what they are doing at camp, understand the meaning of what they are doing at camp. So we work with the staff, and in those first couple of years I can't say that they came up with highly effective programmatic ideas or habits of daily living, ways of being with the kids, that made these huge leaps in our outcomes. Every year that we did it they got better as a group because it was getting embedded in our culture.

To be successful in implementing change, it takes patience and understanding. It is important to realize that change cannot be forced on staff. Forcing change would not have fostered a positive environment for staff and could have resulted in staff dissatisfaction and turnover. High staff turnover is detrimental to a quality program (Akiva, 2013). In a major improvement effort, it is important for leadership to take a step back and allow the process to work. One director shared,

We could envision making big changes pretty easily at the administrative level, but then you have to get it down to the senior staff, and from the senior staff to the frontline staff. You have to get it down there in a way that they can understand (front line staff) and that they can actually do with the kids. That takes time, that's a culture change. So it took longer than we thought.

Preparing staff at the beginning of the process was an important factor. By not taking that step, staff actually resented the surveys at first. Camp D director found that in the beginning it was, "Oh, here she comes...you know...pushing the survey, and the evaluation, and making sure that we are making the changes for that, and I think that is

initially what it was...here we go again.” If staff felt that way in the beginning and they didn’t understand the importance of the surveys, then they could not have understood PIP and how it would benefit camp in the long run. She also explained, “But we learned to involve the staff in the action planning and in doing so staff felt a part of the PIP process and the decisions that they made.” It is possible that staff would have contributed early on and thus achieved more if they would have been involved from the start.

Because front line staff are critical to camper development, camps must invest in staff training. The high and moderate implementation camps have increased the amount of time they spend on staff training. Camp B director stated, “Our training includes teaching mock classes, and challenging staff with, ‘how are you going to offer the campers choice in this activity?’” Adopting a culture of change and improvement means “choosing the right staff, slowing down, using outcomes of unstructured time and looking at the whole camp experience.” In other words, not just relying on camper feedback through surveys or focus groups, but observing and listening to what is taking place on a daily basis. She also explained that through direct observation:

We found, surprising to us, is the second place that campers really met staff and felt comfortable with them was at our camp dining hall because the kids choose for the three days where they want to sit. The staff that are most communicative and talkative and really ask kids questions and talk to them during their meal, they are the ones that the kids feel that they are relating to. That kinda diverged into training on how important mealtime is and how important it is to develop those relationships. This led to changing the staff application to reference this finding and we now give cash bonuses if staff are good at building relationships with kids.

It is critical to teach staff about the youth development framework and the importance of their role. Lastly, using more advanced staff to help train new staff was a practice used by a moderate implementation camp, “(training) is very intentional.

Intentionality has created a really good feel; we have been able to take from the best of the best staff who do it naturally, and give tools to individuals who are still learning that skill.”

Camper engagement, feedback and introducing camper choice was evident in program elements. Youth involvement in decision making is one area of focus that all four camps changed during PIP and continue to focus on today. All four camps reported and shared many examples of how they involved campers during the PIP process which aligned with each of their implementation plans. Most of the examples were ways in which they incorporated choice into their program schedules or changes program elements based upon feedback.

Only two camps continue to use data systematically as a means to assess their overall program to determine where improvements need to be made. This practice is essential to the continuous program improvement process. Both camps also use this data to report to funders and potential donors. As one of these directors stated, “Now the program process had equally transformed, now when children come to camp from 3rd grade on up they are individually choosing every day the activities that they are going to participate in.” Their website content shares, “We are always working to adapt and improve our programs to meet the needs of the children we serve.” In order to understand what the campers need, they must be asked through surveys, observation and other means. What sets the high implementation camp apart from the rest of the camps was the extent to which they collect data. They continue to use data as an essential component to improving their program. They collect data from every camp using multiple methods. These include outcome batteries, camper evaluations or satisfaction surveys, talking

directly with the kids through focus groups, and counselors report on campers. Their director explained, “We get the data, we look at the data, and we try to figure out what do we need to learn from the data to help us understand where we are strong and where we can improve.” Every few years they “shake things up” and change their instruments to learn as much as possible about their program.

Camp D reports to a committee that is responsible for holding them accountable for collecting and analyzing data. Collecting data and analyzing data takes time, but it also takes time to make the changes that come out of the data. As the director explained, “If you don’t like the results you are going to have to be able to still accept it, and accept the fact that maybe you are going to need to make some changes.” Camp D director recognized the importance of feedback as she shared, the “budget for measurement and evaluation. PIP has really made it a priority to spend money on measurement and evaluation, and to make sure we are constantly looking at the services we are providing, and being open to tweaking those as the results show that we need to.”

Of the remaining two, one director noted in regard to collecting data, “we are asking for feedback all of the time. However it takes time to process all of that information...we used the data to energize our staff.” This camp went beyond the others in camper engagement. “What we are finding is it’s the little ideas, not the big ideas. Like snack at night. Instead of everyone getting a granola bar, we create snack boxes so they can choose out of five or six items.”

This area is where the largest difference lies between the high and minimal implementation camp’s commitment to continuous program improvement. The low implementation camp continues to offer camper choice. Their website states, “We

provide choice time in the afternoon.” While they continue to evaluate existing programs to see what needs to change, “We have not done a program like it (PIP) since then to reevaluate where we are and what we want to change now. It’s not something that we talk about anymore.” They use satisfaction survey and evaluations and teach the staff to be “camper centered” which the director interpreted as “doing activities for the campers, not themselves. Camper choice in the songs they sing and the activities.” Yet, programming with a youth development focus was not as apparent when reviewing their camp materials.

PIP created a culture of continuous program improvement and shared beliefs.

Change in organization culture happens over time. Participating in the PIP allowed some camps to see the importance of improving program quality through the practice of continuous program improvement in the short term. However, the high and moderate implementation camps recognized this is an ongoing process that does not just happen with one project. While the minimal implementation camp made improvements during PIP, the long term impact has been to maintain a culture of being “camper centered”, where satisfaction data is collected and decisions are made based upon these results. The other long term implementation is that “we are all more open to change and growth, and getting better.” While they are still open to change and improving, what is missing is the systematic review of organizational practices to measure quality, action planning, implementation and ongoing assessment. “As I went back and looked at our plan a couple of weeks ago I didn’t realize how much of what we are doing are a part of the PIP plan. So we don’t use the PIP language, we don’t survey the kids anymore, we don’t talk about it, but a lot of the changes that were implemented 8 years ago are things that are still

happening at camp now.” This camp evaluates existing programs to see what needs to change. They describe themselves as having a culture of change, but it does not exhibit a culture of continuous program improvement focusing on developmental outcomes. PIP was not intended to be a onetime effort. It provided camps with a tool to use not a binder that was put on the shelf “but we have not done a program like it since then to reevaluate where we are at, and what we want to change now. It’s not something that we talk about anymore.” This camp has continued to make programmatic changes, but these alone are not the changes that significantly improve program quality which in turn positively impacts the supports and opportunities. Success is exhibited in Camp A director’s attitude that, “whatever we thought about in 2005, I am 99% sure we have evolved the idea.”

When the other camp directors described their commitment to continuous improvement and a culture of change, they were more holistic and intentional. Some of these changes were already included previously, but a true culture of change starts at the policy level, the mission and filters through the organization and is then woven into the daily activities offered at camp. Dedicating resources to measurement is another way to show a true commitment to a culture of continuous improvement. But seeing the bigger picture was the most important change. This is evident in a comment made by Camp A’s Director, “In my mind, the PIP process was the very tip of the iceberg, the very beginning of a much larger, much broader, comprehensive process.”

PIP led to Intentional Programming to promote positive youth development outcomes. Regardless of the current level of PIP implementation, the one area where all four camps focused a great deal of time and effort then and now is on making changes to programming elements to promote positive youth development outcomes. The goal of

PYD is to provide youth with the tools they need to become successful adults. PIP was a reminder of that goal. Camp A has “evolved beyond the PIP process in terms of seeing the power of both programmatic experiences and these long term relationships in children’s lives that makes substantial changes in their lives that last.” Ways that programs were changed included turning leadership over to campers, encouraging staff to build positive relationships, offering a variety of programs to encourage skills building, increasing a sense of safety, and seeking out camper input into decision making and offering campers choices or a voice.

Youth involvement is important because they need to be involved in meaningful roles and responsibility. Camps focused on turning leadership over to campers. “We have worked with our staff and being conscious in turning the leadership over to the camps as much as we possibly can.” Additionally, there were times when campers were in leadership roles but didn’t recognize it. She explained, “They had leadership before, but they didn’t recognize it as leadership.” They spent time debriefing after activities because it was the best time to point out opportunities for leadership. In camp brochure, Camp A’s website states, “our program teaches adolescents to recognize their innate leadership abilities.”

Another area of youth involvement was seeking camper input into decision making. Camp C’s director described decision making as a camper choice and being camper centeredness. “Rather than staff making choices about crafts, etc., these decisions are driven by camper choice.” Camp A director stated, “They are participating every day in what they want to participate in out of a plethora of choices.” She also explained that

camper choice was not just about what activities they would participate in, but it was also more subtle:

Our camp is such an anchor in our kids' lives, what we heard them say, they didn't use these words, but we do not want you to totally turn this thing inside out so we don't recognize it. So we really paid attention to them and we continued to make changes, but we listened to the kids about what it is they like, and what direction we think we should be going with them. They are very much an agent in the process.

Focusing on relationship building was another area of change that all four camps made and continue to make. Staff trainings include the importance of building relationships with campers. Not only are they encouraged to build relationship with the kids in their cabins, but others in common areas such as the dining hall. Camp B director explained, "The second place that they really met staff and felt comfortable with them was at our camp dining hall." She also explained that it takes more than one adult and "now we provide multiple supportive adults to kids who may be having issues." This is important because kids need to learn to trust. Camp B website states, "One of our goals is to help your child learn to trust other caring adults, and to find solutions to challenges on their own. This is an important step as your child develops independence, conflict resolution skills, and increased self-confidence."

Camps encouraged kids to participate in something new and to promote skill building whenever possible. Previous to PIP, most of the camps had structured activity time where all of the kids would do an activity together. After PIP, they opened up multiple opportunities for campers to choose from. One advantage of being able to choose was if a child liked to swim, he could choose to swim every day.

If you are a kid from an underperforming school, where are your opportunities to experience genuine mastery? They don't know their capacity because no one, no institution, no experience has really given them a chance to experience it, to know.

Well you can do that at camp. Camp is the most supportive, encouraging, challenging, youth development and education thing I know of.

Another program focus was to create a safe environment where kids felt physically and emotionally secure. Camp A changed from campers registering on a first come first served basis to interviewing every applicant along with their parent to determine if the child was actually ready for camp. The director shared that due to this change they found that “fewer kids were going home.” Camp B experienced a situation where they realized they were trying to rush through their evening activities which kept campers from really getting to know staff, “So we slowed down and took some other stuff out, and took some time and effort to actually play a game with the counselors because we felt that the kid’s told us that they felt safe with people that they knew and were comfortable with.”

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand the nature of continuous program improvement through the experiences of four camps that participated in a 2005 program improvement process. Several themes emerged from our analysis of the case study data that provide insight into the affordances and barriers camp administrators faced when implementing program improvement over time. The affordances, or elements that supported continuous program improvement, that emerged from these cases can be described as a culture of improvement. Our findings related to culture of improvement are well-documented in the literature related to youth program quality. In contrast, the barriers that prevented continuous program improvement are less represented in this body of knowledge.

During the PIP process, camps went through an organizational assessment using the nine organizational practices created by YDSI. These organizational practices were categorized as Structure (S), Policy (P) and Organization Activities (A). They then created action plans or strategies that they felt were necessary to improve their camper's reports of the supports and opportunities. Two of the four camps chose to address all three areas, and one mostly focused its strategies on (A) Activities. This choice seems to be directly related to where the camps PIP implementation stands today.

The strategies directly related to (A) Activities have contributed to camps overall ability to adopt what we have determined is a culture of change. A culture of change includes an emphasis on camper choice and camper centeredness. While Camp C has embraced a culture of change, they missed the opportunity provided by PIP to create a systematic process to evaluate their effectiveness in impacting developmental outcomes. During PIP, the results showed that those camps that chose to implement change in all three organizational practices were twice as successful at impacting youth development outcomes (ACA, 2006).

Camps that were most successful were also those that did not just implement the strategies set in their actions plans, or whose efforts were directly solely at program changes, but they learned from the PIP process. More importantly, their goals were to improve program quality focusing on youth development outcomes beyond the notion of camper centeredness or camper choice. A culture of change alone does not result in the same impact on supports and opportunities and therefore program quality as a culture of improvement (ACA, 2006). The goal is to improve program quality, as Henderson (2005) discussed, children who attend a high quality camp should experience multidimensional growth. Overall, these camps were systematic and intentional in their processes which Yohalem, (2009) contends is necessary to ensure program quality. The following discussion provides the affordances to continuous improvement.

Connel and Kubisch (1999) suggested that in a theory of change approach, there must be agreement between all stakeholders. Both Camp A and Camp D chose to implement change at the Policy level which means that not only did they include staff and campers in the PIP, they had the buy in and support of the Board of Directors. The

Board must be involved if strategies include making changes at the Policy level. Once an entire organization comes together and determines a new direction, the potential for success improves exponentially. Especially when the strategic plan is redesigned to set the direction, and the mission statement is rewritten to express the vision.

One key area that appeared to support continuous program improvement was the use of data. Leading experts in program quality stress that the use of data is the first step in an ongoing process of program improvement (Grossman, 2009; Smith, Akiva & Sugar, 2012). Collecting and analyzing data is critical to finding deficiencies in a program. Two of the four camps had a strong emphasis on data collection. One even answered to a committee to keep them accountable for data collection. They embraced program improvement, incorporated it into their culture, and dedicated the necessary resources to ensure their success. The data was not just evaluated within their camp environment, but they also looked at their data in relationship to other data sets.

Assessment is also important when relying on outside funders to sustain a program (Yohalem, Granger & Pittman, 2009) Camp A has a \$1.2 million annual operating budget. Of this, \$1 million is donated, and \$400,000 comes from the United Way. They have to raise the remaining \$600,000 every year. Some funders such as camp alumni may donate because of an emotional attachment to the camp. However, the majority of funders must be convinced that an applicant's program has value. As part of their extensive application process, they require data that supports a camp's claim that their program creates an environment where youth experience positive developmental outcomes. Camp A is very intentional in the way it uses the ACA outcome batteries, and

this data provides funders with concrete data that shows that they provide a developmentally rich environment.

Staffing at both the administrative level as well as front line staff could be considered both an affordance and a barrier, so we will discuss them together beginning with affordances. Point of service quality refers to the unique interaction between staff and participant. How staff and middle managers deliver content, interact with participants and create a healthy environment (Akiva, 2013; Grossman, 2009; Yohalem et al., 2007,) and are all part of quality at the point of service. Staff are the most critical component of a program's success (Akiva, 2013; Pittman, Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2007). Therefore, staff involvement is paramount to successfully engage in a program improvement process. Equally as important, they must understand positive youth development (Henderson, Bialieski & Scanlin, 2006-2007). During PIP, all four camps increased the amount of time spent on staff training and talked about youth development and the importance of the supports and opportunities. While not all of them involved staff in the decision making at the beginning, some realized that staff buy in was critical. However, Camp A involved the staff from the beginning and made them part of the process. Even when the Director felt that the staff might not be making the same decisions that she would have made regarding programmatic and "ways of cabin living" changes, she allowed them that opportunity. Not only are front line staff critical to the process, administrative staff play a major role in a camp culture because they are provide guidance and leadership to the front line staff. They set an example and ensure that staff have the necessary resources such as training and materials, to do their job.

Camp A and Camp B have directors who have been with the organization for many years. Over time, they have had a substantial impact on developing a culture of change and improvement at their camp both before and after PIP. To ensure continuity, one has a succession plan in place in case an administrator leaves. Identifying individuals to bring up through the ranks and mentoring them ensures that the gains made in program improvement and the culture of change can be sustained over time in spite of administrative turnover. Conversely, all of the leadership at Camp D left and a camp counselor was promoted to the administrator position. The new director commented that PIP strategies and goals were set by the previous leadership team. Her familiarity with PIP as a camp counselor was basically remembering that they surveyed the kids, made program changes, and talked about being camp centered. Therefore, the new director has embraced and maintained a culture of change, but not necessarily of culture of improvement. It is apparent that the previous leadership team did not include the staff or counselors in the decision making during the PIP. If they would have, the new director would have understood the “why” of the PIP. Without the why, fostering a culture of improvement to positively influence youth developmental outcomes is missing. This barrier provides another reason as to why staff should be involved in most every aspect of a program improvement process as substantial as PIP. Additionally, if there is change in key leadership, organizational memory and culture remain.

Another barrier to continuous program improvement was limited time and resources. The amount of time that a project such as PIP takes can be drastically underestimated, especially when it involves policy, practices and program elements. The strategies that were created by these four camps were mostly achievable in the first few

years. However, the systematic changes from Board level to front line staff took more time than originally anticipated. Grossman (2009) suggested that creating a system of assessing quality at the point of service should start slowly. Camp A created a great number of strategies, but then later on realized it would take several years to implement all of them. Starting slowly was also important because their camp serves at risk youth, and camp provides them with a stable environment. Therefore, making a lot of changes in a short period potentially threatens their sense of safety and security.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In any industry, achieving quality is important. Whether it is selling widgets or providing services, the quality of the product determines whether it will be successful or fail. In youth serving organizations, quality is even more important because the product is the lives of children. For over a century, a great deal of time and resources have been dedicated to understanding the relationship between summer camps and youth development. Because of these efforts, there are tools available such as the Community Action Framework for Youth Development for summer camps to improve the already flourishing environment and activities they offer. The undertaking of an improvement process such as PIP may seem daunting. By discovering the affordances and barriers faced by these four camps, it is hoped that anyone considering this process will see it as less daunting. More importantly, it is hoped that they will see it as necessary.

Implications for Practice

Those who are in the field of leisure services understand that their services improve quality of life. This is true whether leisure is in community recreation, travel and tourism, hospitality, sports and youth services such as summer camps. With ever shrinking budgets, more organizations have had to adopt a business model to compete for resources. It is important that these business practices do not overshadow the social

services aspect of the industry, especially in youth services. Additionally, with fewer available resources, collecting data beyond satisfaction surveys can seem overwhelming and impossible. However, a systematic program of improvement is necessary to ensure that their youth programs are not just allowing kids to have fun and that they are staying out of trouble, but to really create an enriching environment that provides youth with the necessary tools to develop into successful adults. Measuring and assessing programs provides management with important decision making tools.

The affordance and barriers described in this study should be encouraging to summer camp practitioners. Beyond what is already known, this study demonstrated how critical staff is to the success or detriment of a program improvement process. More focus should be given to their training and development in preparation for the process, not as an afterthought. Their involvement should not be limited to the implementation phase, because that raises fears that they aren't doing their job, it built resentment, and turning decision making over to campers created unrest. When starting a program improvement process, share the "why." Staff needs to understand from a research perspective how critical their role is to the campers. Not just in terms of safety and activities, but in building positive relationships.

Recognizing the critical role camp Administrators have in creating and maintaining organizational memory and culture, succession planning needs to be a priority anytime, but especially when implementing large organization-wide changes. In some camp programs, Director turnover is more common than in others. However, mentoring counselors and front line staff to move up in the organization should be an ongoing process. Creating a culture of improvement should be a goal worthy of any camp

program. Using a tool such as the Community Action Framework can guide them through this process of improvement and set them on an exciting path of making a good program great.

When considering a program improvement process, an administrator needs to fully understand all of the steps necessary to do so. They need to be fully prepared to allocate the resources which include funding for training and measurement. As demonstrated in this study, budgeting dollars for data collection is critical. When funds are allocated, it is to budget time to garner support from all stakeholders including policy makers and then working together to create a mission, vision, and strategic planning for their program. Mostly, they will need to provide continuous support and education to the staff.

Implications for Research

Because of the significant impact staff and administrative turnover has on camp quality, more research in this area would be beneficial. The first summer camps were formed by individuals who were passionate about creating a safe, healthy and natural environment for children to grow. Individuals such as Hedley Seldon Dimock dedicated much of their lives and their resources to this endeavor. Because of this passion, summer camps now serve thousands of youth every year. During this study, it was noted that two of the case study camps had directors who had been with the camp for a very long time. This had a positive impact on the camp's culture and their ability to embrace the concept of continuous program improvement. These directors demonstrated their commitment to going above and beyond and it was evident that their camps were a significant part of their lives. It would be important to understand how director passion

impacts camp quality. It would also be important to understand what types of characteristics to look for when seeking out new camp administrators/directors.

This study provided some insight into ways camps could foster staff buy in and why it is important. Quality at the point of service is an effective way to measure program quality. Point of service evaluates the quality of interactions between staff and campers which plays a major role in program quality. If there is significant staff turnover, then program quality is negatively impacted. Future research on staff development and ways to create a positive work environment at camp to retain staff would be beneficial. As discussed during this study, camps were most successful when they included staff at the beginning of the process. These camps also increased the amount of time they spent on staff training to include youth development. Research and the development of staff training protocols would provide more assistance to camps that choose to take on a large scale program improvement process. By having these in place, staff would have a better understanding of the process, their role in the process, and their importance to camper success.

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