

Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Challenges and Obligations of the Games Organizing Committee

Guamaral Enkhtuvshin
University of Tsukuba, Japan

Introduction

- COVID-19 is a severe acute respiratory infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. As of July 9th, 2020, more than 12 million cases of coronavirus have been reported all over the world (WHO, 2020).
- On March 11th 2020, WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2020)
- On March 24th, 2020, The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and The Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic (TOGOC) released a joint statement announcing the postponement of Tokyo 2020 due to the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after, the Government of Japan declared a state of emergency on April 7th to prevent the spread of the Covid-19. The postponement, the lockdown, and its ongoing consequences have heavily impacted all the stakeholders of Tokyo 2020 as well as the games organizing committee including a workplace shift to remote-working.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the challenges and obligations of the Games Organizing Committee of Tokyo 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic and discover how the different working environment impacted their work performance to fulfill the commitments towards the implementation of the successful event although the event has been postponed to 2021.

Literature Review

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- COVID-19 is one of the most threatening illnesses caused by a respiratory virus since the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic (Lodise & Rybak, 2020).
- By July 19, 2020, Covid-19 has already infected over 14 million people (Johns Hopkins University of Medicine, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).
- In contrast to the past pandemics, COVID-19 is not caused by influenza A virus, however, it is similarly caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Individuals with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection frequently developed mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, fatigue, aches and pains, and shortness of breath (World Health Organization, 2020b)

COVID-19 AND SPORTING EVENTS

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all level of sports organizations had to postpone or cancel their events from elite level to grassroots level (Sato et al., 2020).
- COVID-19 resulted in the postponements of two of the largest mega-events in the world that were scheduled for the summer of 2020: the Olympic Games and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Euro 2020 (Parnell et al., 2020).
- The ramifications of these postponements and terminations are unprecedented, but many commentators and sports professionals expect this to profoundly transform the way the industry functions in the future (Parnell et al., 2020a).
- According to the data from the New York Times' interviews of 511 epidemiologists and infectious disease specialists from the U.S. and Canada, 64% of the epidemiologists expect that it will take more than a year to sporting events and gatherings (The New York Times, 2020).

THE POSTPONEMENT OF TOKYO 2020 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- The postponement will gradually effect significant financial ramifications that are now projected to add an additional \$2.7 billion to the \$12.6 billion budget, making it the second-most expensive games in history (Evans, 2020).
- Aside from the financial issues, the postponement and its ongoing consequences have heavily affected all the stakeholders of Tokyo 2020 as well as the games organizing committee and their workplace shift after the Government of Japan declared the state of emergency on April 7, 2020 to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As noted as Brooks et al., (2020), people who are in lockdown likely to develop a wide range of symptoms of psychological stress and disorder, including low mood, insomnia, stress, anxiety, anger, irritability, emotional exhaustion, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms (p.919).
- Sato et al., (2020) suggested that decision makers and leaders from the Japanese government and international governing bodies such as the IOC and international federations (IFs) should consider disseminating reliable information to safeguard human lives although Japanese citizens still desire to host the Olympics in 2021(p.5).

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF MEGA SPORT EVENT ORGANIZATIONS

- Temporary organizations are always motivated by a need to perform specific actions in order to achieve immediate goals (Lundin & Söderholm, 1994)
- ...the unique characteristics of mega sport event organization are temporary, grows rapidly, and provides rich symbolism (Parent, 2008)
- "...fixed opening ceremonies date makes the organizing committee structurally dependent on time, the task at hand, and building a team undertake the work with limited resources" (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2012)

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT AND EMPLOYEES' WORK PERFORMANCE

- A workplace environment can highly impact employees' work performance and productivity both positively and negatively (Chandrasekar, 2011)
- Working environment comprises the totality of forces, actions and other influential factors that are currently and, or potentially contending with the employee's activities (Kohun, 1992)
- A workplace environment consists of physical and behavioral components, and behavioral component has greater impact on employees' performance as compared to the physical component (Haynes, 2008)

Methods

Primary data: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with individuals (N=10+) who work for TOGOC in different functional areas. The collected data from the interviews will be analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis tool, to derive the key findings for the meaning and relevancy themes.

Secondary data:

- Journal and newspaper articles
- Official reports
- IOC, TOGOC, The Government of Japan, website

Expected Results

The extracted data after analyzing is expected to identify the challenges and situational factors associated with the TOGOC employees' work performance and productivity during the Covid-19 pandemic.