

Psychological contract fulfillment in youth coaches of the J League

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Aim

One of the pillars of success in the development of professional football in Japan has been the involvement of clubs with their local communities as well as the promotion of youth football (Light & Yasaki, 2002). Membership rules in the J League mandate that clubs in divisions J1 and J2 have youth teams within their structures. Within this scheme, the role played by youth coaches becomes undeniable as they are responsible to not only coach the future star players, but also and perhaps more critically, help to sustain the overall business of football as youth coaches are critical in engaging hometown communities and promoting the love for football within the younger generations. O'Connor and Bennie (2006) noted that youth coaches who are supported, valued, and rewarded for their efforts are less likely to withdraw from their jobs. Despite the critical role played by youth teams within the overall structure of the J League, no previous studies have examined the working conditions of youth football coaches. Moreover, no studies have examined the role of the psychological contract in these coaches. This study examines the extent of psychological contract fulfillment (PCF) on professional youth coaches working in the J League. The psychological contract at work posits that implicit exchange relationships exist between employers and employees in regards to belief of agreements made on each side (Rousseau, 1995). While the psychological contract is essentially subjective, its effects are real, and the breach can create adverse results for both the organization and their employees.

From a sample frame of 607 youth football coaches working in clubs affiliated with the J League, 200 of them responded to the questionnaire that addressed five dimensions of the PCF (Robinson & Morrison, 1995) over a series of work-related outcomes. Of the total responses, 152 (76%) were fully completed. Dimensions of the PCF included: transactional, relational, training, generic, and resource support. Work-related outcomes included: job satisfaction (Dunham & Smith, 1979), affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), trust (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), and turnover intention (Cohen, 1998). The factor structure of the PCF dimensions and four outcome variables was examined using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results indicate that the proposed measurement model was an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.80, p < .01; CFI = .93; NNFI = .92; RMSEA = .07$). All factor loadings exceeded .50 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) confirming convergent validity. Comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) value for each construct with the squared correlations between the respective constructs, none of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values for the proposed

constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, discriminant validity was indicated.

The effects of the PCF dimensions on employee-related outcomes were examined. A series of hierarchical regression analyses with three control variables (age, gender, and organizational tenure), five PCF dimensions, and four outcome variables (job satisfaction, affective commitment, trust, and turnover intention) were employed. In Model 1, age and organizational tenure had significant effects only on affective commitment ($\beta = -.19, p < .05; \beta = .19, p < .05$), and these control variables explained a small amount of variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .02$), affective commitment ($R^2 = .06$), trust ($R^2 = .03$), and turnover intention ($R^2 = .01$). In Model 2, relational contract had positive effects on job satisfaction ($\beta = .46, p < .01$), affective commitment ($\beta = .35, p < .01$), and trust ($\beta = .47, p < .01$) and a negative impact on turnover intention ($\beta = -.38, p < .01$). The dimension of generic contract also had a positive effect on trust ($\beta = .36, p < .01$). Conversely, the dimensions of transactional contract and training had adverse influences on trust ($\beta_{\text{transactional contract}} = -.33, p < .01; \beta_{\text{training}} = -.28, p < .01$) and turnover intention ($\beta_{\text{transactional contract}} = .27, p < .05$). The inclusion of the five PCF dimensions significantly increased the variances in the dependent variables (job satisfaction, $\Delta R^2 = .18, p < .01$; affective commitment, $\Delta R^2 = .18, p < .01$; trust, $\Delta R^2 = .27, p < .01$, and turnover intention, $\Delta R^2 = .14, p < .01$), indicating that the outcome variables are primarily a function of the PCF dimensions, not the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Based on the measurement model implications were drawn concerning construct and predictive validity.

Results

Results of this study highlight the importance of the PCF in working relationships, particularly the role of the relational contract. In this study, the relational dimension showed a significant effect on all of the four employee-related outcomes. The importance of the relational contract suggests that youth coaches working at the J League not only care about their salaries, their promotion, and other material rewards (transactional dimension of PC) that they can get from their clubs, but also about the human side and the socio-emotional interactions they establish with their employers. This means that their job satisfaction, trust, commitment to their clubs, and their intention to stay in their current jobs is significantly explained by the quality of these socio-emotional relationships. Considering that youth coaches represent an important pillar within the J League, and that the majority of these coaches do not receive big salaries, one critical managerial implication would be to strengthen the quality of the working environment between coaches and club administrators. The ultimate goal would be to create enduring and trustful relationships to keep these coaches on the job.

References

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