

Session: **Project management of big sport events I.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0156**

The relationship between sport event volunteers' commitment, satisfaction and perceived organisational support

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Volunteers are utilised extensively in the preparation and execution of sporting events, and contribute substantially to their success. The majority of studies reported on sport event volunteering focus on the motives of volunteers at such events. While a considerable literature base exists on general volunteer motives (see for example Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998; Anderson, & Cairncross, 2005; Boz, & Palaz, 2007) and volunteer motivation at sporting events (see for example Farrell et al, 1998; Kemp, 2002; Ralston et al, 2004; Monga, 2006; Baum & Lockstone, 2007; Giannoulakis et al, 2008), there is a dearth of studies focussing on other aspects of volunteer behaviour such as commitment, retention or performance, on volunteer outcomes such as satisfaction or benefits, or the nature of the organisational support provided to volunteers in the context of sport events.

This paper provides a conceptual overview of the importance of the relationships between satisfaction, affective commitment and POS of sporting event volunteers. The paper explicitly argues for a number of hypotheses:

- POS will influence the variance of volunteer satisfaction with the organisation.
- POS will influence the variance of volunteer satisfaction with their role.
- POS will influence the variance of a volunteers' affective commitment to the organisation.
- POS will influence the variance of a volunteers' affective commitment to their role.

Although a significant amount of research focusing on organisational commitment, satisfaction and perceived organisational support (POS) exists within paid employment settings, comparatively little data addresses the relationships between organisational commitment, satisfaction and POS within a voluntary context. Consequently, the situation where there is little (if any) paid employment relationship between volunteers and their organisation (Catano, Pond & Kelloway, 2001), represents an ideal context in which to explore the relationship between volunteers' satisfaction and organisational commitment, and their perceptions of organisational support.

As POS is a relatively new concept (Eisenberger et al, 1986), its application within a voluntary context has been limited; POS has been examined amongst volunteers in assessing the psychological contract of volunteers, and the impact of POS on the contribution and withdrawal of volunteers to non-profit organisations (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). POS was identified to lead to increased volunteer attendance, performance and innovation, and positively impacted intentions to remain with the organisation (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). Additionally, positive perceptions of organisational support were found to enhance volunteer perceptions of their field placements whilst volunteering, as well as improving training and satisfaction with their role (Balvin, Bornstein & Bretherton, 2007). Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) identified the benefits of providing non-volunteers with information about organisational support during recruitment, in which it was found that such perceptions of organisational support encouraged feelings of respect for the organisation, and heightened attraction to the organisation during recruitment. However an examination of POS amongst sporting event volunteers has not yet been performed.

Whilst a number of studies report on volunteer satisfaction in relation to variables such as retention, turnover and motivation, few studies have examined the relationship between volunteer satisfaction, commitment and POS. Research has identified positive relationships amongst volunteer satisfaction and organisational commitment, where a satisfied volunteer is likely to be more committed to the organisation they are volunteering (Silverberg et al, 2002; Costa et al, 2006; Mills & Schulz, 2009). Similarly, when a volunteer experiences unpleasant working conditions, they are more likely to suffer lower levels of satisfaction, which affects commitment. However, this relationship may be positively mediated by organisational support, which was identified to be an important job characteristic to affect volunteer satisfaction and affective commitment (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005 and Walters & Raybould, 2007).

Additionally, the literature suggests that perceived supervisor support (PSS), which is closely related to, yet distinct from POS, correlates positively with affective commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Gagnon & Michael, 2004; Vandenberghe et al, 2004; Stinglhamber, De Cremer & Mercken, 2006; Chen, Wang, Chang & Hu, 2008), and employee satisfaction (Brough & Frame, 2004; Brough & Pears, 2004; Gagnon & Michael, 2004; Mc Calister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon & Steinhardt, 2006; Hall, 2007). It is important to investigate PSS as an antecedent to POS, to determine whether PSS positively influences satisfaction and commitment, as individuals build relationships with both the organisation, as well as their supervisor (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Wayne, Shore & Linen, 1997; Eisenberger et al, 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2006). As previous research has indicated that PSS correlates positively with affective commitment and employee satisfaction within a paid employee scenario, it is critical to examine such a relationship amongst sporting event volunteers.

The paper explores the nature of organisational support that can be provided to sport event volunteers, specifically ensuring fairness, supervisor support, favourable rewards and task conditions, opportunities for growth and participation in decision making are present in volunteer

management systems. The paper concludes with a discussion of the elements that comprise organisational support for sport event volunteers that may assist event management organisations design and deliver effective management practices which may enhance individual volunteer satisfaction and commitment.