EMPLOYMENT-RELATED LEGACIES OF THE 2011 RUGBY WORLD CUP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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Type: Scientific
Category: 14: Other sport management related issues

Abstract

The potential for major event volunteer programmes to impact the workplaces of volunteers who are also in paid employment is an under-explored area. Previous research has acknowledged the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge of volunteers (Gratton & Preuss, 2008), but has not explicitly considered if these are transferable to the volunteer's workplace. While some volunteers are motivated by skills-related factors (Kemp, 2002; Williams, Dossa, & Tompkins, 1995) little is known about whether additional capacities, knowledge and skills are acquired and transferred back into the workplace. Three employment-related legacies that could benefit workplace organisations are self-perceived employability (an individual's ability to keep their job or secure a new one), learning orientation (employee's own efforts to create and use knowledge) and innovative behaviour (employees enact change and improvement without the consent or knowledge of managers or those formally responsible for innovation).

Participants were recruited from the 2011 Rugby World Cup volunteers. Employment-related legacies were measured using three scales: self-perceived innovative behaviour at work (IBW) (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009), improved workplace-learning orientation (WLO) (Gray & Meister, 2004), and self-perceived increased employability (SPE) (divided into internal (SPEI) and external (SPEX) dimensions) (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The 7-point scales were labelled from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Approximately half of the volunteers were provided with the survey version containing questions on employment legacies. Among this sample of volunteers, the employment-legacy questions were asked only to those who said they were in paid employment at the time of survey completion (this was about 7 out of 10 volunteers in each round). An online survey collected data at five time points (rounds) over 15 months: Round A (2.5 months before the event); Round B (two weeks before the event started); Round C (immediately after the event); Round D (six months post-event) and Round E (10.5 months posy-event).

Linear mixed models were used to analyses the repeated measures data from across the five rounds (Round A, n=614, Round B, n=500, Round C, n=906, Round D, n=533, and Round E, n=422). Each model included the variable Round as a categorical covariate and also the demographic variables gender, age and ethnicity. Additional models were derived from this main model by the inclusion or exclusion of Round data and covariants: demographic profile (gender, age, ethnicity), personal satisfaction (measured at Round C), and work-orientated variables: multiple roles, employer-support and personal development expectations and experiences.

Overall, the results provide little evidence that the volunteer program was associated with an enhanced capacity for innovative behaviours at work, workplace learning orientation or self-perceived employability. For both IBW and WLO, there was no evidence that the volunteer experience is associated with increased IBW and WLO. IBW and WLO both varied significantly across the five rounds. Scores for both variables scores were significantly lower in Rounds D and E than in Round A. Scores for both decreased significantly between Rounds C and Round D. The pattern of how IBW and WLO changed over time did not vary according to any of the independent variables.

For SPE, there was also no evidence that the volunteer experience is associated with increased self-perceived employability. The level of internal and external self-perceived employability varied significantly across the five rounds of data collection. Scores for both SPEI and SPEX were significantly lower in Rounds D and E than in Round A. Scores decreased significantly between Rounds C and Round D. No significant change was evident between Round A and Round C.

The results suggest that the window for perceived benefits is certainly short-lived. The volunteer experience does not appear to have been long enough, intense enough or valuable enough to bring about a changed perception. The halo effect of a volunteer experience is greatest pre-event and likely commences as soon as the volunteer is appointed, and not just when the volunteer begins duty. These results do not suggest that the RWC 2011 volunteer program failed to provide benefits to its volunteers, as there are potential benefits beyond these specific employment-related aspects. Employers should still encourage their staff to participate in volunteer experience but they should not expect much in the way of innovation or an improved workplace orientation. There are of course other benefits from employees participating in volunteer activities that might have a measurable influence on the workplace.

References

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