

Employee pride and identification with sport: key drivers of positive organisational behaviour in professional sports

Authors: Steve Swanson (1), Aubrey Kent (2)

Institutions:

1. Loughborough University, London, UK
2. Temple University, USA

E-mail: s.swanson@lboro.ac.uk

Aim

Despite calls for investigation of organisational life and human resource management in the sport environment (e.g., Doherty, 1998), the sport management discipline has generally given more attention to other areas of the field such as marketing, consumer behaviour, and more recently sport for development. The current study utilised a positive organisational behaviour approach to provide additional insight in this area, which some scholars have proposed should be a primary focus of organisational research (e.g., Luthans, 2002). From a similar perspective, Todd and Kent (2009) developed a model of positive social identity and proposed that sport employees might experience psychological fulfillment in excess of what is seen in other industries. A main aim of the current study was to empirically assess Todd and Kent's conceptual model by examining the impact of sport employee pride on job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour. In addition, this study tested the hypothesis that identifying with a specific sport can be a contributing factor to increased levels of employee pride in the current context.

Theoretical background

The concept of pride is closely connected to the sporting environment. This feeling is often associated with hard work and success, and generally considered worthy of pursuit for a wide variety of participants. In the workplace, the pride of employees is viewed as a strategic asset closely associated with performance and organisational success, with previous research indicating a positive association with key outcomes such as commitment, compliance, and employee self-efficacy. Sport employee pride represents feelings of importance, value, and admiration based on status evaluations of one's current job situation (Tyler & Blader, 2001). As employees experience positive feelings and evaluations relating to their job's importance and value, it follows that this should then lead to a positive general assessment of their job. In addition, individuals who evaluate their group in a positive fashion tend to internalise group interests and equate them with their own, which should then lead to actions which are beneficial to the organisation. Furthermore, with previous research indicating that individuals are capable of identifying with a specific type of sport (Trail, Robinson, Dick & Valentine, 2003), this highly relevant identification target in the current context may serve as facilitator of employee pride. In a similar way that member attraction and perceived fit can lead to employees experiencing enhanced psychological fulfillment in the sport workplace (Todd & Kent, 2009), identification with the specific sport of their respective sector may also have a positive impact on pride levels in this setting.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The participants for the study were business operations employees (N = 1,082) from Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and the National Hockey League. The data were collected using an online survey emailed to a random sample of employees working in departments such as finance, marketing, and sponsorship. This study used survey items which have been shown previously in the literature to be valid and reliable. The construct reliability and discriminant validity of the latent constructs were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis techniques commonly used in the literature. Structural equation modeling was utilised in the final phase of the analysis to assess the relationships within the hypothesised research model. Alternative models were also considered in connection with additional perspectives from the literature.

Results, discussion and implications

The results of the structural equation analysis provided support for all of the relationships in the hypothesized model. A positive relationship was found between sport identification and employee pride, which in turn had a significant impact on job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour. The current findings suggest that managers within the sport environment should recognise the significance of their employees feeling important and valued, as this appears to have a meaningful impact on their general satisfaction and non-contractual efforts on behalf of the organisation. Perhaps the most interesting result in the current study, however, was the presence and impact of identifying with a specific type of sport. Although not hypothesised in the theoretical development, alternate model testing indicated that sport identification also had significant influence on job satisfaction and citizenship behaviour. Recognising the positive impact this construct can have on key attitudes and behaviours in the workplace is an important consideration for sport managers in relation to hiring decisions, human resource initiatives, and promoting a healthy environment.

References

- Doherty, A. J. (1998). Managing our human resources: A review of organisational behaviour in sport. *Sport Management Review*, 1(1), 1-24.
- Luthans, F. (2002). Positive organizational behavior: Developing and managing psychological strengths. *Academy of Management Executive*, 16(1), 57-75.
- Todd, S., & Kent, A. (2009). A social identity perspective on the job attitudes of employees in sport. *Management Decision*, 47(1), 173-190.
- Trail, G. T., Robinson, M. J., Dick, R. J., & Gillentine, A. J. (2003). Motives and points of attachment: Fans versus spectators in intercollegiate athletics. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 12(4), 217-227.
- Tyler, T. R., & Blader, S. L. (2001). Identity and cooperative behavior in groups. *Group processes and Intergroup Relations*, 4(3), 207-226.