

Don't Worry, Be Fulfilled: Exploring Employees' Experience With Leadership And Fulfillment In The Major Games Context

Smith, Lindsay; Spence, Kirsty

Brock University, Canada

E-mail: ls10en@brocku.ca

Research purpose

The workplace is said to be central to employees' lives and a primary institution in which many find meaning and purpose. Many employees seek truly satisfying work engaging their talents, abilities, and core values toward worthwhile endeavours (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014). Despite the workplace being a cornerstone in employees' lives, little is known regarding the influence of human resource management practices or of leadership on employees in the Major Games (i.e., Olympic/Paralympic Games) work context. Given the paucity of knowledge on this topic, the purpose of this study is to explore the association of authentic leadership on the development of employees' perceived workplace fulfillment in the Major Games context, where employees' perceived workplace fulfillment refers to the eudaimonic ideal of fully engaged employees, working while realizing their potential through emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually fulfilling work (Kenney, 1998).

Theoretical frameworks

Authentic leadership is characterized by leaders winning employees' trust and respect by prioritizing their values, encouraging diverse viewpoints, and developing collaborative relationships (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). Given authentic leadership is associated with outcomes including improved employee attitudes, behaviours, and psychological wellbeing, it may be reasonable to understand that authentic leaders assist in fostering positive and ethical work climates that are characteristic of optimism, and honest leader-employee relationships. These authentic leader characteristics align with the workplace spirituality framework, centralized on the notion of employees' inner lives as both nourishing and nourished by meaningful work. Through alignment of these frameworks, the theoretical proposition guiding the current study outlines that authentic leaders foster a climate of workplace spirituality, and are thus able to promote employees' perceived workplace fulfillment.

When workplace spirituality is fostered, organizations experience decreased stress-related illness, burnout, absenteeism and corruption among their constituents. Indeed, both employees and organizations benefit in numerous ways, including: value congruence; work quality; increased life satisfaction; subjective wellbeing; productivity; creativity; success and organizational profitability. Given the authentic leader focuses on honouring his or her internal values and beliefs through alignment with behaviours, it is proposed that such behaviour allows for workplace spirituality to emerge, allowing employees to perceive some degree of workplace fulfillment.

While the Major Games context is understood as unique given its high velocity environment that is extremely susceptible to change (Parent, Olver, & Séguin, 2009), evidence of employees' perceived workplace fulfillment may be elusive due to unique contextual stressors, including: workload, time constraints, role ambiguity, job insecurity, and work-life conflict (Odio, Walker, & Kim, 2013). As Major Games hosting has become popularized over time, events involve thousands of individuals working jointly where choice of leader is pivotal to the success of the event due to complex working environments.

Methodology

For the current study, a qualitative research design and a phenomenographical methodology were applied, where 20 individuals (i.e., middle managers [e.g., manager or coordinator roles] employed in one or more Major Games' events from 2010 to present) were purposively recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Through open coding and thematic data analyses the researcher developed themes that contribute toward further understanding the value of leaders applying authentic leadership practices toward improving employees' perceived workplace fulfillment.

Preliminary results

Preliminary results from analyses of five initial participant interviews indicate that participants are involved in Major Games events, including: Olympic and Paralympic Games, Pan and Para Pan American Games, European Games, Invictus Games and Commonwealth Games, and perceive the Major Games environment to be intense, pressurized and time sensitive for employees, while remaining largely positive. Participants feel that leaders set the tone and contribute to the organizational culture by delegating, empowering, and trusting employees to manage tasks, while supporting and protecting employees from external fac-

tors impacting work ability (i.e., political spectrum, resource sharing). Participants believe that fulfillment is subjective to the experiencer, but is positively influenced by their individual sense of purpose and value congruence with the event, along with workplace achievement and overall client satisfaction. Preliminary results also indicate that through leaders' influence on organizational culture (i.e., empowerment), employees develop a sense of purpose and alignment between workplace culture and community, leading to feelings of fulfillment.

Conclusion

A discussion of implications and recommendations for both sport management academics and leader practitioners interested in the leader/employee phenomenon in the Major Games context will follow a discussion of results. The lack of existing research on the topic of leadership and its influence on both work climate and fulfillment is worthy of study, where a deeper understanding regarding employees' experience with workplace fulfillment will contribute toward both developing Major Games literature and practice.

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