

Influence of support available at work on the attitudes of fitness club employees

Boyun Woo, The Ohio State University

Packianathan Chelladurai, The Ohio State University (Advisor)

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Abstract 141**

Fitness industry is considered as one of the biggest and fastest growing businesses in sport industry with the total revenue estimated at \$17.6 billion in 2006 (IHSA, 2007) and with 205,000 jobs in 2004 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). With increasing competition among the fitness clubs, it has become important for a fitness club to obtain and retain competitive advantage for its survival and success. As human capital is a source of such advantage (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004), recruiting good employees and retaining them is crucial for the success of the organization. Employees of fitness clubs make a significant contribution to recruiting and retaining members of the club. Therefore, the quality of work the employees do at the fitness clubs is directly related to the overall performance and success of the clubs.

Research has shown that employee's perception of support at work (i.e., from coworker, supervisor, and organization) has an influence on employee attitudes and behavior. According to social exchange theory, employees who receive such support are said to develop commitment to the organization through a reciprocation process (Bartlett, 2001; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Setton, Benneett, & Liden, 1996; Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman, & Prottas, 2004). In turn, organizational commitment has been shown to influence work behaviors including effort put forth (Chelte & Tausky, 1986) and turnover intention (Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). However, most studies fail to investigate the impact of different types of support (coworker, supervisor, and organizational support) on different dimensions of organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative commitment). Even the studies that specify the dimensions of organizational commitment, the focus has been somewhat limited to affective commitment.

One other factor influencing employee behaviors and performance is said to be one's motivation (Kuvaas, 2003). Most studies examining the effects of motivation have focused largely on intrinsic motivation, and they were concerned with the direct effects of motivation on organizational commitment (e.g. Bartlett, 2001; Kuvaas, 2003). A different perspective would hold that motivation moderates the relationship between motivation and organizational commitment. In addition, it is important to investigate such moderating effects of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the relationship between support at work and the three forms of organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative).

The purpose of the study is to investigate the links among perceived support at work, organizational commitment, work effort, turnover intention, and motivation among fitness club employees. More specifically, the support from three sources (i.e., coworkers, supervisor, and the organization itself) is said to influence one's organizational commitment composed of affective, normative, and continuance commitments. Organizational commitment is shown to influence both employee work effort as well as his or her turnover intention. Finally, the relationship between support at work and organizational commitment is said to be moderated by one's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

The participants will be recruited with the help of National Exercise Trainers Association (NETA) which offers certification in group exercise, personal training, pilates, and yoga. The program is offered across the country, and NETA has certified over 120,000 fitness professionals. NETA has kindly agreed to send an email message to its members requesting them to participate in the study. The message would include a link to a website for the online survey. When respondents voluntarily respond to the survey, their responses will be directly transmitted to the researchers. The survey contains selected scales to assess perceived support, organizational commitment, work effort, turnover intention, motivation, and items to elicit background information (gender, age, employment status, type of fitness club, years in the fitness club, and years worked in the industry). The response format for all items in the scales will be a seven-point scale ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7).

The analyses would include confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the factor structure of the scales employed and structural equation model (SEM) procedures to test the proposed relationships in the model. In addition, differences in employee attitudes and the relationships among them between subgroups defined by gender and type of fitness club will also be explored.

The results of the study would contribute much to sport management literature in three significant ways. First, the study will be conducted in a fitness club setting where there has been no study examining the relationships between perceived support and employees' work attitudes. Second, most previous studies examined single dimensions of support, organizational commitment, and motivation. In contrast, this study would investigate different dimensions of each of these variables and the relationships

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among them. Third, this study will be the first to examine moderating effects of two types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) on the relationship between support and organizational commitment.

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