The Impact of Coach/Athlete CSR Activities on Employee Personal and Organizational Outcomes: The Role of Behavioral Integrity

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Management/leadership
Abstract 2011-224
Saturday, June 4, 2011
4:30 PM
20-minute oral presentation
(Room 240)

Increasingly, businesses are finding themselves in the position of having to address and respond to a multitude of social concerns and obligations (Quazi, 2003). Of these concerns, corporate social responsibility (CSR) represents one area that has taken center stage as organizational executives are giving increasing priority to CSR and its role in the viability and sustainability of their firms (Franklin, 2008). As a part of society, sport organizations are no exception, if not representative of a distinct CSR environment when compared to other firms (i.e., sport organizations, leagues, and teams each hold unique positions in societies throughout the world; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Thus, the “participation by sport organizations in CSR and related activities broadens the base and hence the social legitimacy of the whole CSR notion, that private-sector organizations have at least real interests, if not real obligations, in creating and sustaining a higher quality of life” (Godfrey, 2009, p. 712).

Yet, in spite of the increasing prominence of CSR to sport organizations, there are several areas that require more focused scholarly attention. Notably, the motives behind CSR activities and the benefits/outcomes of CSR activities are two key issues that have gone largely uninvestigated (Walker & Kent, 2009). Therefore, in light of these limitations, the goal of this paper to explore one possible conceptualization of the CSR activities of a sport organization and how they can potentially lead to positive employee personal (i.e., job satisfaction) and organizational outcomes (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviors), with particular attention being paid to the impact of the internal resources of a sport organization (i.e., coaches and athletes), which may differ considerably—if not uniquely—from the internal elements of other business organizations.

Babiak and Wolfe (2009) noted how coaches and athletes may provide sport organizations with a competitive advantage with CSR activities because these individuals can be valuable and rare, and sport consumers’ identity, admiration, and passion may be “imperfectly imitable” (Babiak & Wolfe, p. 732). Interestingly, the impact of coaches’ and athletes’ CSR activities may extend to more than just sport consumers; it may also extend to sport organization personnel. Therefore, in addition to exploring how coaches and athletes may garner greater media attention and more immediately captivate sport consumers with CSR messages, one further area warranting academic consideration is how the CSR activities of coaches and athletes impact the personnel within a sport organization, not just the sport consumers external to a sport organization.

Personnel are undeniably essential to the success of any organization (e.g., Becker & Huselid, 1998; Schneider, 1987). Consequently, in following, relevant theory and research are brought together in the formulation of a conceptual model exploring how the CSR activities of a sport organization’s athletes and coaches may impact sport organization personnel and lead to positive employee personal and organizational outcomes. In particular, four relationships are conceptualized: (a) the CSR activities of a sport organization’s coaches and athletes will impact sport employees’ perceptions of the CSR activities; (b) employees’ perceptions of coaches’ and athletes’ CSR activities will lead to an emotional response; (c) employees’ emotional responses will impact personal and organizational outcomes; (d) the relationship between the coaches’ and athletes’ CSR activities and employees’ perceptions of the activities will be moderated by the employees’ perceptions of the coaches’ and athletes’ behavioral integrity (BI). Two key aspects to this conceptualization are the roles of sport organization employees’ perceptions of coaches’ and athletes’ BI and employees’ emotional responses to their perceptions of these CSR activities. Each of these aspects of the conceptual model are discussed in the subsequent sections.

First, BI has been defined as “the perceived pattern of alignment between an actor’s words and deeds” (Simons, 2002, p. 19), which is definitional similar to Palanski and Yammarino’s (2007) definition of integrity, which is “the consistency of an acting entity’s words and actions” (p. 178). In effect, BI represents the level of “fit” between what is espoused and what is actually done without consideration for the morality of the espoused values (i.e., a value-neutral conceptualization). Thus, the impact of BI is not so much connected to the morality of the actions (although they are hopefully ethical and genuine), but the word-deed consistency.

Overall, various attitudinal and behavioral outcomes have been argued (Simons, 2008) when individuals, such as subordinates, perceive BI with another individual (e.g., manager or supervisor). Specifically, managers’ levels of BI have been linked to employees’ levels of trust, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (among others; Davis & Rothstein, 2006; Prottas, 2007). Thus, the extent to which sport organization employees perceive the coaches and athletes engaging in CSR activities (for a sport organization) as having a high degree of BI may significantly influence whether or not the CSR activities are perceived...
positively or negatively. Furthermore, how sport organization employees perceive the respective CSR activities of the coaches and athletes will likely lead to emotional responses on the part of the employees, which will possibly lead to employee personal and organizational outcomes. That is, positive perceptions of CSR will likely lead to positive emotional responses and vice-versa.

Second, emotional expressions and experiences have long been an area of interest for management scholars (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998; Hochschild, 1983), and in accordance with emotion regulation theory, an emotional cue will lead to an emotional response tendency. This tendency will then increase the likelihood of a particular emotional response (positive or negative). Herein, our focus has been narrowed to one particular aspect of the emotion regulation process: emotional response. By and large, negative emotions lead to negative personal and organizational outcomes (e.g., Frijda, 1988; Weiss & Crompanzano, 1996). On the other hand, positive emotions (e.g., joy) are likely to increase commitment to the organization (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Thoresen et al., 2003; Wegge et al., 2006) and widen the scope of positive employee organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs; Levine, 2010; Miles et al., 2002; Weiss & Crompanzano, 1996), which have themselves been linked to a variety of positive outcomes (e.g., organizational effectiveness; Koys, 2001; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Sundstrom, 1999). In addition, positive emotional responses are likely to increase the prospects of positive personal outcomes such as job satisfaction (e.g., Fisher, 2000; Liu et al., 2010; Weiss et al., 1999). In short, positive emotions typically lead employees to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance constructive workplace involvement and resource building (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), and therefore represent a desired workplace phenomenon.

In sum, coaches and athletes who engage in CSR activities may provide their respective sport organizations with a competitive advantage unavailable to non-sport business firms (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Incidentally, as we have argued in this paper, the impact of these individuals’ CSR activities may extend to both sport consumers and sport organization employees. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore one possible conceptualization regarding how the CSR activities of a sport organization can impact sport organization personnel and potentially lead to positive employee personal and organizational outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and OCB respectively). The proposed conceptual framework is centered on the idea that coaches and athletes voluntary and philanthropic CSR activities may generate emotional responses among sport organization employees and potentially contribute to the advancement of corporate culture (Peterson, 2004) and positive personal and organizational outcomes. Moreover, at the core of this paper is employee perceptions of the BI of both the coaches and athletes engaging in CSR activities and how this factor may impact the CSR perceptions of sport organization employees.

Finally, as it was not explicitly discussed in the preceding sections, one area of future research that would advance the present conceptual model would be exploring the role of sport employees’ identification with their sport organization. That is, examine whether or not the CSR initiatives by coaches and athletes increases or decreases employees’ identification levels, and how this subsequently impacts employee emotional responses and personal and organizational outcomes.